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THE OPTIMIST



THE OPTIMIST; *By*  
*E. M. DELAFIELD* *Author of*  
*“Tension,” “The Heel of Achilles,” etc. :: ::*

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TO  
C. A. DAWSON-SCOTT  
IN AFFECTIONATE ADMIRATION OF HER WORK



## CONTENTS

					PAGE
I.	VALERIA AND OWEN QUENTILLIAN	-	-	-	13
II.	ADRIAN	-	-	-	123
III.	DAVID AND FLORA	-	-	-	181
IV.	THE DEATH OF AN OPTIMIST	-	-	-	257
V.	OWEN AND LUCILLA	-	-	-	281



I

VALERIA AND OWEN QUENTILLIAN



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# THE OPTIMIST

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## I

### VALERIA AND OWEN QUENTILLIAN

(1)

THE ship swung slowly away from the side of the wharf.

Several people on board then said : " Well, we're off at last ! " to several other people, who had only been thinking of saying it.

Owen Quentillian remembered another, longer sea-voyage taken by himself at an early age. Far more clearly he remembered his arrival at St. Gwenllian.

It was that which he wanted to recall, aware as he was of the necessity for resuming a connection that had been almost insensibly broken off several years earlier.

He deliberately let his mind travel backwards, visualising himself, a disconsolate, shivering morsel, being taken away from Papa and Mama at the very station itself, and put into an open pony-cart beside Miss Lucilla Morchard.

The conversation between them, as far as he could recollect it, had run upon strangely categorical lines.

" Who are you ? "

" I'm Canon Morchard's daughter. You may call me Lucilla."

"How old are you?"

"I'm fifteen, but you shouldn't ask grown-up persons their age."

"Oh, are you a grown-up person?"

"Of course I am. My mother is dead, and I look after the house and the children, and now I'm going to look after you as well."

Lucilla had smiled very nicely as she said this.

"How many children are there?"

"Three, at home. My eldest brother is at school."

"What are the names of the other ones?"

"Valeria and Flora and Adrian. Valeria and Flora are sometimes called Val and Flossie."

He had discovered afterwards that they were seldom called anything else except by their father.

"Why don't Papa and Mama come in this little carriage too?"

"Because there wouldn't have been room. They will come in the brougham, later on."

"They won't go back to India without saying good-bye first, will they?" he asked wistfully.

He had known for a long time that Papa and Mama were going back to India and leaving him at St. Gwenllian.

"No, I promise you they won't do that," had said Lucilla seriously.

Owen had felt entirely that her word was one to be relied upon. Very few grown-up persons gave him that feeling.

He remembered extraordinarily little about the house at St. Gwenllian. It was large, and cold, and there were a good many pictures on the walls, but the only two rooms of which he retained a mental photograph were the school-room and the Canon's library.

He saw the latter room first.

Lucilla had taken him there at once.

He remembered the books against the wall—numbers and numbers of books—and the big black writing-table, with a small bowl of violets next to a pile of papers, and above the writing-table a finely-carved ivory figure, crucified upon a wooden cross, set against an oblong plaque of pale-green velvet.

Lucilla had seemed to be disappointed because her father was out.

"He said he did so want to be here to welcome you himself, but he is always very busy. Someone sent for him, I think."

The youthful Owen Quentillian had cared less than nothing for the non-appearance of his future host and tutor. The prospect of the schoolroom tea had touched him more nearly.

But the schoolroom tea had turned out to be a sort of nightmare.

Even now, he could hardly smile at the recollection of that dreadful meal.

Eventually Val and Flossie had resolved themselves into good-natured, cheerful little girls and Adrian into a slightly spoilt and rather precocious little boy, addicted to remarks of the type hailed as "wonderful" in the drawing-room and "affected humbug" in the schoolroom.

But, on that first evening, Val and Flossie had been two monsters with enormous eyes that stared disapprovingly, all the time, straight at Owen Quentillian and nobody else. Adrian had been an utterly incomprehensible, rather malignant little creature, who had asked questions.

"Can you see colours for each day of the week?"

Quentillian wondered whether he had looked as much alarmed as he had felt, in his utter bewilderment.

"I think Monday is blue, and Tuesday light-green, and Wednesday dark-green," Adrian had then proclaimed triumphantly, and casting his big brown eyes about as though to make sure that his three sisters had heard the enunciation of his strange creed.

"Adrian is not a bit like other little boys," one of them had then said with calm pride.

Owen Quentillian, unconscious of irony, had ardently hoped that she spoke truly.

Adrian had pinched him surreptitiously during tea, and had laughed in a way that made Owen flush when they had asked him what India was like and he had answered: "I don't know."

He had thought the thick bread-and-butter nasty, and wondered if there was never any cake. A vista of past teas, with sugared cakes from the drawing-room, especially selected by himself, and brought to his own little table on the back verandah by the ayah, made him choke.

There had been a dreadful moment when he had snatched at the horrid mug they had given him and held it before his face for a long, long time, desperately pretending to drink, and not daring to show his face.

Lucilla, seated at the head of the table, had offered the others more tea, but she had said nothing to the little strange boy, and he still felt grateful to her.

The miserable, chaotic jumble that was all that his mind retained, of interminable slices of bread-and-butter that tasted like sawdust, of thick, ugly white china, of hostile or mocking gazes, of jokes and allusions in which he had no share, all came to a sudden end when he had given up any hope of ever being happy again so long as he lived.

Canon Morchard had come into the room.

And, magically, Val and Flossie had turned into quiet,

insignificant little girls, looking gently and trustfully at their father, and no longer staring curiously at Owen Quentillian, and Adrian had become a wide-eyed, guileless baby, and the thick bread-and-butter and the ugly china no longer existed at all.

Only Lucilla had undergone no transformation.

She said: "This is Owen Quentillian, father," in a matter-of-fact tone of voice.

"I know, my child, I know."

His hand, large and protecting, had grasped the boy's hand, and after a moment he had stooped from his great height and put his lips gently to Owen's forehead.

Quentillian remembered a presence of general benignity, a strangely sweet smile that came, however, very rarely, a deep voice, and an effect of commanding height and size.

Memory could not recapture any set form of words, but Quentillian endeavoured, whimsically, to recast certain speeches which he felt to be permeated with the spirit of the Canon.

"My dear little boy, I hope you may come to feel this as home. We shall all of us endeavour to make it so. Lucilla here is my little housekeeper—ask her for anything that you want. Valeria—my tomboy. She and you will have some grand romps together. Flora is younger; nearer your own age, perhaps. Flora plays the piano, and we hope that she may show great feeling for Art by-and-bye. Little Adrian, I am sure, has already made friends with you. I call him the Little Friend of all the World. There are some very quaint fancies under this brown mop, but we shall make something out of them one of these days—one of these days."

Some such introduction there had certainly been. The Canon had been nothing if not categorical, and Quentillian

could fancifully surmise in him a bewilderment not untinged with resentment had his Valeria one day tired of being a tomboy and elected to patronise the piano, or Flora suddenly become imbued with a romping spirit, to the detriment of her artistic propensities.

But the Canon's children had always refrained from any *volte-faces* calculated to disconcert their parent. Quentillian was almost sure that all of them, except Lucilla, had been afraid of him—even Adrian, on whom his father had lavished a peculiar, cherishing tenderness.

Quentillian could remember certain sharp, stern rebukes, called forth by Valeria's tendency to untimely giggles, or Flora's infantile tears, or his own occasional sulks and obstinacy under the new *régime*. But he could only once remember Adrian in disgrace, and so abysmal had been the catastrophe that imagination was unneeded for recalling it clearly.

Adrian had told a lie.

Quentillian relived the terrible episode.

"Which of you children took a message for me from Radly yesterday? Not you, Lucilla?"

"No, father."

"Mrs. Radly died last night." The Canon's face was confused. "She asked for me all yesterday, and Radly actually left her, in order to find some way of sending me a message. I hear now that he met 'one of the St. Gwenllian children' and sent an urgent summons which was never delivered. *Which was never delivered!* Good heavens, children, think of it! I was here, in our own home circle, enjoying a pleasant evening reading aloud, when that woman was dying there in the farm, craving for the help and comfort that I, her shepherd and pastor, could and should have given her."

He covered his face with his hand and groaned aloud.

"In all the years of my ministry," he said slowly, "I have never had a more bitter blow. And dealt me by one of mine own household! Children," his voice boomed suddenly terrible, "which of you received Radly's message yesterday?"

Quentillian, in the retrospect, felt no surprise at the absence of any competition in laying claim to the implied responsibility.

At last Lucilla said tentatively:

"Val? Flora?"

"I never saw Radly at all yesterday, nor any other day," said Val, her brown eyes wide open and fixed straight upon her father.

Flora's little, pretty face was pale and scared.

"It wasn't me. No one ever gave me any message."

Her voice trembled as though she feared to be disbelieved.

"Owen?" said the Canon sternly.

"No, sir."

"Adrian?" His voice softened.

"No, father."

The Canon hardly appeared to listen to Adrian's answer. His hand was on the little boy's brown curls, in the fond, half-absent gesture habitual to him.

He faced the children, and his eye rested upon Owen Quentillian.

"If any of you," he said sternly and slowly, "has been betrayed into telling me a lie, understand that it is not yet too late for full confession. Selfish heedlessness cannot be judged by its terrible consequences, and if I spoke too strongly just now, it was out of the depths of my own grief and shame. The forgetfulness was bad—very bad—

but that I can forgive. A lie, I can *not* forgive. It is not too late."

His face was white and terrible as he gazed with strained eyes at the children.

Little Flora began to cry, and Lucilla put her arm round her.

"Understand me, children, denial is perfectly useless. I *know* that message was given to one of you, and that it was not delivered, and it is simply a question of hours before I see Radly and obtain from him the name of the child to whom the message was given. I accuse no one of you, but I implore the culprit to speak out. Otherwise"—he hit the table with his clenched fist, and it seemed as though lightning shot from his blazing eyes—"otherwise I shall know that there dwells under my roof a liar and a coward."

Quentillian could hear still the scorn that rang in that deep, vibrant voice, terrifying the children.

Not one of them spoke.

And the Canon had gone out of the room with anguish in his eyes.

The nursery court-martial that followed was held by Lucilla.

"Flossie, it couldn't have been you because you stayed in all yesterday with your cold. Owen and Val were out in the afternoon?"

"We went to see the woman with the new twins," said Val indignantly. "We never met anyone the whole way, did we, Owen?"

"No."

Owen Quentillian had known all the time what was coming. He knew, with the terrible, intimate knowledge of the nursery, that Adrian was the only one of the Canon's children who did not always speak the truth.

Apparently Lucilla, also, knew.

She said, "Oh, Adrian," in a troubled, imploring voice.  
"I didn't," said Adrian, and burst into tears.

"I knew it was Adrian," said little Flora, "I saw Radly coming up the lane very fast; I saw him out of the night-nursery window, and I saw Adrian too. I knew it was Adrian, all the time."

None of the children was surprised.

Adrian, confronted by their take-it-for-granted attitude, ceased his mechanical denials.

The preoccupation of them all was Canon Mordard.

"It'll be less bad if you tell him yourself than if Radly does," Owen Quentillian pointed out.

"Of course, it makes it much worse having told him a lie," Val said crudely; "but perhaps he didn't much notice what you said. I'm sure he thought it was Owen, all the time."

How much better if it had been Owen, if it had been any one of them, save the Canon's best-loved child, his youngest son!

"You must come and tell him at once," Lucilla decreed—but not hopefully.

"I can't. You know what he said about a liar and a coward under his roof."

Adrian cried and shivered.

"He wasn't angry the time I broke the clock," said Flora. "He took me on his knee and only just talked to me. I didn't mind a bit."

"But you hadn't told a story," said the inexorable Val.

They all knew that there lay the crux of the matter.

Quentillian could see the circle of scared, perplexed faces still—Lucilla, troubled but unastonished, keeping a vigilant hold on Adrian all the time; Val, frankly

horried and full of outspoken predictions of the direst description; Flossie in tears, stroking and fondling Adrian's hand with the tenderest compassion. He even visualised the pale, squarely-built, little flaxen-haired boy that had been himself.

They could not persuade Adrian to confess.

At last Lucilla said: "If you don't tell him, Adrian, then I shall."

And so it had been, because Canon Mordard, re-entering the schoolroom, had, with a penetration to which his children were well accustomed, instantly perceived the tears and the terror on Adrian's face.

"What is it, little lad? Have you hurt yourself?"

The kind, unsuspecting concern in his voice, as he held out his hand!

Quentillian was certain that a pause had followed the enquiry—Adrian's opportunity, conceded by Lucilla, even while she knew, as they all did, that he would take no advantage of it.

Then Lucilla had told.

Quentillian's thoughts went off at a tangent, dwelling for the first time, with a certain surprised admiration, upon Lucilla's resolute, almost matter-of-fact performance, of her painful and alarming task.

Canon Mordard had been incredulous at first, and Lucilla had steadily repeated, and reiterated again and again, the dreadful truth.

A black time had followed. It assumed the proportions of a twelvemonth, in the retrospect. Could it have extended over a week? Strangely enough, Quentillian could not recall the exact fate of Adrian, but he knew that the Canon had first fulminated words of wrath and scorn, and at last had actually broken down, tears streaming

down his furrowed face, and that the sight of this unrestrained, almost unheeded, display of suffering had caused the boy Owen to creep from the room, with the strange, sick feeling of one who has witnessed an indecency.

All the children except Lucilla, who indeed scarcely counted as one of them, had avoided Canon Mordard in the ensuing days. They had crept about the house silently, and at meals no one spoke until the Canon had left the room. Owen Quentillian, playing with a ball in the passage, and inadvertently bouncing it against the closed study door, had been suddenly confronted by the Canon, and the look of grief and horror fixed upon that handsome face had rendered any spoken rebuke for levity unnecessary.

After all, they had left an impression, those Mordards, all of them, Quentillian reflected.

Lucilla had been calm, matter-of-fact, competent—perhaps a little inhuman. Val, impetuous, noisy, inclined to defiance, yet frankly terrified of her father. Flossie—impossible to think of her as Flora, unless the name was uttered in the Canon's full, deep tones—surely the prettiest of the three, gentler than Val, less self-assured than Lucilla, timid only with her father. Adrian, of course, did not speak the truth. His contemporaries had known it, although Canon Mordard had not realised the little boy's habitual weakness. But then he had never realised that the children were afraid of him.

Why had they all been afraid of him?

Quentillian decided that it must have been because of his own phenomenal rectitude, his high standard of honour, and, above all and especially, his deep, fundamental sense of religion.

Canon Mordard, undoubtedly, lived “in the presence of God.” Even the little boy Owen had known that, and,

thinking backwards, Quentillian was convinced of it still.

He felt curious to see the Canon again. David Mordard had said to him in Mesopotamia: "Go and see him. They've none of them forgotten you, and they'll be glad of first-hand news. I've only been home once in five years."

The shrug of his shoulders had seemed to Quentillian expressive.

But evidently David had judged his family correctly. The Canon had written and invited his old pupil to stay with him.

"It will not only be joy untold to receive news of our dear lad David, but a real pleasure to us all to welcome you amongst us once more. I have not forgotten my pupil of long-ago days, nor my daughters their erstwhile playfellow. You will find all at home, including Adrian. Dear fellow, I had hoped it was to be the Church for him, but he has been so open, so anxious to decide the whole important question *rightly*, that one can only leave the decision to him in all confidence. I would not hurry him in any way, but his army days are over, thank God, and we have the untold pleasure of having him with us now, so full of fun and high spirits, dear boy. You, with your pre-war experience of Oxford, will perhaps be able to talk things over with him and help him to a right and wise decision.

"You will remember my eldest daughter, Lucilla. She is still my right hand, mothering the younger ones, and yet finding time for all sorts of wider interests than those afforded by her secretarial work for me. I think that you will agree with me that Lucilla's intellectual abilities, had she been less of a home bird, must have made their mark in the world.

"Valeria is still something of the madcap that perhaps you remember. Her energy and enthusiasm keep us all in the best of spirits, even though we are sometimes a little startled at the new ideas sprung upon us. Both she

and Flora worked valiantly during the terrible war-years, though I could spare neither of my darlings to leave home for very long at a time. Valeria, however, was six months in France at a canteen, and I believe rendered really valuable service. Little Flora, as I still call her, gives pleasure to us all with her music, and our men in hospital were sharers in her gift as far as we could manage it."

Quentillian took up yet another sheet of note-paper covered with small, legible writing. It came back to him with a sense of familiarity that the Canon had always been an expansive and prolific writer of letters.

" Make us a long visit, my dear boy. There are no near ones to claim you, alas ! and I should like you to remember that it was to us that your dear father and mother first confided you when they left you for what we then hoped was to be only a short term of years. God saw otherwise, my dear lad, and called them unto Himself. *How incomprehensible are His ways, and how, through it all, one must feel that mysterious certainty : ' all things work together for good, to those that love Him ! '* Those words have been more present to me than I can well tell you during the years of storm and stress. David's long, weary time in Mesopotamia tried one high, but when Adrian, my Benjamin, buckled on his armour and went forth, my heart *must* have failed me, but for that wonderful strength that seems to bear one up in the day of tribulation. How often have I not said to myself : ' He hath given His angels charge over thee . . . in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone ! '

" Perhaps you will smile at this rambling letter of an almost old man, but I fancy that as one grows older the need to bear testimony becomes ever a stronger and more personal thing. His ways *are* so wonderful ! It seems to me, for instance, a direct gift from His hand that the Owen

Quentillian to whom I gave his first Latin prose should be returning to us once more, a distinguished young writer. I wonder if we shall recognise you? I have so vivid a recollection of the white hair and eyelashes that made the village boys call out, 'Go it, Snowball!' as they watched your prowess on the football field!

"Well, dear fellow, I must close this. You have only to let us know the day and hour of your arrival, and the warmest of welcomes awaits you.

"I *must* sign myself, in memory of old happy times,

"Yours ever affectionately,

"FENWICK MORCHARD."

Quentillian, with great precision, folded the sheets together again.

"So Lucilla is a home-bird, Valeria is still something of a madcap, Flora is still 'little Flora,' and Adrian is a dear lad who is anxious to decide rightly about his future career."

He wondered doubtfully whether he himself would come to endorse the Canon's opinion of the Canon's progeny.

And what was the Canon himself, if labels were to be thus distributed?

The sensation of doubt in Quentillian's mind was accentuated, but he concluded his reflections by reminding himself, half tolerantly, and half with a certain grimness, that the Canon was at least, according to himself, Quentillian's ever-affectionate Fenwick Morchard.

(ii)

"This is like old times," said Quentillian.

Lucilla Morchard smiled, shook hands with him, and made no answer, and Quentillian immediately, and with

annoyance, became conscious that the occasion was not in the least like old times.

Apparently Miss Mordard did not accept *clichés* uncritically.

Her face, indeed, expressed a spirit both critical and perceptive. Quentillian could still trace the schoolgirl Lucilla in the clearly-cut, unbeautiful oval, with the jaw slightly underhung, grey, short-sighted eyes, and straight black brows. Her dark hair was folded plainly beneath her purple straw hat, but he could discern that there was all the old abundance of it. Her figure was tall and youthful, but her face made her look fully her age. He surmised that Lucilla must be thirty-five now.

"This time, my father *is* here to welcome you."

She turned round, and Quentillian saw the Canon.

"Ah, dear fellow! Welcome—welcome you be, indeed!"

A hand grasped Quentillian's hand, an arm was laid across his shoulders, and the Canon's full, hearty voice, very deep and musical, rang in his ears.

Quentillian felt inadequate.

With all the acute self-consciousness of the modern, he was perfectly aware that Canon Mordard's warmth of feeling and ardour of demonstration awoke in himself nothing but a slight, distinctly unpleasant sensation of gratitude and a feeble fear of appearing as unresponsive as he felt.

"I think it's the same Owen Quentillian, isn't it?"

The steady pressure of the Canon's arm compelled his unwilling returned prodigal to remain still, facing him, and submit to a scrutiny from kind, narrowed eyes.

"Just the same. All is well—well, indeed."

The Canon's hand smote Quentillian gently between the shoulders as they walked down the platform.

"The trap is waiting, dear boy. They are eager for your arrival at home. I have my whole goodly company awaiting you, thank God—Lucilla here, and my merry Valeria, and little Flora with her incurably shy ways, and my Benjamin—the youngest of the flock—Adrian. You and Adrian must have many talks, dear lad. I want just such a friend for him as yourself—full of youth, and fun, and merriment, as he is himself, and yet able to help him when it comes to facing the deeper issues—the deeper issues. You young people must have many wise, deep talks together, such as youth loves. I remember my own younger days so well, and how 'we tired the sun with talking'—aye, Owen, your father and I were famous philosophers, some thirty odd years ago ! How does that strike you, eh ? "

It struck Quentillian principally that his father's contemporary reminded him oddly of a book of late Victorian memoirs, but he did not voice the impression aloud.

Instead, it was a relief to him to be able to make an obvious, and yet perfectly sincere, comment upon the unchanged aspect of the old red-brick house, standing well away from the small town.

"Valeria is our gardener," said Canon Mordard. " You will be consulted about her various borders and the like, no doubt. But we have all of us an interest in botany. You must remember that from the old days, eh ? There was a collecting craze, if I remember rightly, that led to a great deal of friendly rivalry amongst you children."

Quentillian's recollection of the collecting craze differed so drastically from that of the Canon, that he glanced involuntarily at Lucilla. She met his eye calmly, but he fancied a little latent hostility in her unconsciousness.

It rather served to confirm his impression of the extreme

lack of spontaneity that had characterised those bygone excursions into the realms of Nature. They had been undertaken, at least by himself and his ally and contemporary, Valeria, with one eye, as it were, upon the Canon's study window. Even Adrian, if Quentillian remembered rightly, had relaxed the normal enthusiasm of boyhood in the pursuit of birds' eggs after the wondrous eye for detail of the bird's creator had been sufficiently often pointed out to him.

"Welcome home," said the Canon happily. "You remember the old garden? I seem to recollect some capital fun going on amongst the old rhododendron bushes at hide-and-seek, eh? We play lawn-tennis nowadays. I see a sett is going on now. Who is here this afternoon, Lucilla?"

"Captain Cuscaden is playing with Flora, and I suppose it's Mr. Clover in the far court."

"To be sure. Clover is my excellent curate, who has been one of ourselves for several years now. Sit ye down, young people, sit ye down. Tea will be out here directly, and the players will no doubt come for refreshment."

The Canon settled himself with the deliberation of a heavily-built man, and leant back in his wicker chair, with finger-tips joined together, the breeze stirring the thick grey hair upon his temples.

It was a cameo-like head, with something of the ivory colouring of a cameo, but the cameo's blank orbs were replaced by deeply-set, brilliant hazel eyes, of which the flashing, ardent outlook recalled at once the child and the fanatic. Innumerable fine lines were crossed and recrossed at the corners of either socket, but the broad forehead was singularly open and unlined.

Quentillian noted the sweetness of the closed mouth,

contrasting with the masculine jut of the strong, prominent jaw. His mind registered simultaneously the recollection of the Canon's violent and terrifying outbursts of anger, and his astonishing capabilities of tenderness.

The latter expression was altogether predominant as the tennis-players came to join the group under the cedars.

"Valeria—Flora—you need no introductions here, dear lad. Clover, let me present my old pupil—one of whom you have very often heard us speak—Owen Quentillian. This is my very good friend and helper. And . . . ? Ah, Captain Cuscaden—Mr. Quentillian."

Quentillian fancied less enthusiasm in this last introduction, and it seemed to him significant that no descriptive phrase followed the name. Either Captain Cuscaden was not worth classifying, or he could not satisfactorily be relegated into any class, and Quentillian suspected that Canon Mordard would resent the latter state of affairs more than the former.

At all events, Cuscaden was good-looking, of bold allure and sunburnt face, revealing the most perfect of teeth in a pleasant smile.

Mr. Clover was sandy and pale, and seemed to be talkative.

"I believe I should have known you anywhere," Valeria Mordard told Quentillian, frankly gazing at him.

He was not sorry to have the opportunity of gazing back as frankly at her.

As children, the handsome or unhandsome looks of Val, his inseparable playmate, had naturally interested him not at all. He had vaguely acquiesced in the universal nursery dictum, that Flora, with her fair curls and wide, innocent eyes, was pretty, but he now found her blonde slenderness insignificant in the extreme compared to Valeria, with her

tall and perfectly balanced figure, ripe-apricot bloom, and her brown, laughing eyes. No longer a very young girl, she somehow combined the poise of her twenty-seven years with a shy, semi-abruptness of diction reminiscent of seventeen.

Quentillian thought her charming.

"And who bore off the palm of victory?"

Canon M orchard indicated the tennis-court.

"We won, at five games all. A very good set," Clover replied. "My partner's service is almost invincible."

Canon M orchard smiled.

"We think Valeria's service is her strong point," he explained to Quentillian. "She was coached by our dear David, and David is no mean player, I assure you. Little Flora needs to stand up to the ball better—stand up to the ball better. Flora has the feminine tendency to hit out too soon—eh, Flora? Our champion is Adrian, however. You and he will have some great contests, I foresee."

The more the Canon foresaw, the more did Quentillian's own aspirations turn in search of contrary directions. The only diversion of those predicted by his host of which he felt able to tolerate the thought was that of being consulted by Valeria about the herbaceous borders.

"Clover, there, has a particularly good stroke on to the back line, but you'll get to know it. Have you played, at all, since you left the 'Varsity?"

"I got a good deal of tennis when I was home on leave in nineteen-sixteen, but nothing after that, when I was in Mesopotamia."

"Were you not in Flanders, dear boy?"

"In 'fifteen and 'sixteen," said Quentillian briefly.

He wished to remember neither his two years on the Western front, nor his many months in hospital with shell-shock.

"Where did you and David meet, in Mesopotamia?" enquired Lucilla.

Quentillian had forgotten her presence, if not her existence, but he felt grateful to her for sparing him the tentative category of his soldiering capabilities which he suspected the Canon of having in readiness.

He was not, however, given time to answer Lucilla's question.

The Canon's hand was uplifted.

"Ah, Lucilla my dear—please! My little talk with Owen, there, is to come later. There is so much that I want to hear about our David—much indeed. And you shall have your share of news about your brother, my child; but wait—at least wait until we have had our little private talk together."

Lucilla bent her head a little under the rebuke, either in acquiescence or to conceal some slight confusion; but Valeria blushed hotly and unmistakably, and everyone looked constrained except the Canon, who looked rather severe, rather grieved, and at the same time perfectly serene. When he spoke again, it was with marked suavity.

"Tell us something of your literary work, dear fellow," he requested Quentillian. "I am ashamed to say that I have read nothing of yours, as yet. My time is so little my own. Lucilla here is our literary critic."

He placed his thin, beautiful hand for a fleeting moment upon his eldest daughter's.

"Lucilla tells me that she knows your work. Critical essays, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

Quentillian gravely acknowledged the truth of the assertion. His self-consciousness rather enhanced than diminished in him a keen appraisement, perhaps rather

less detached than he would have liked it to be, of his own literary value.

"I published a small volume of essays before the war, but since then I have only been a very occasional contributor to one or two of the reviews."

"Ah, yes. You must let me see what you have done, some day. This is the era of youth. Indeed, some of the things I see in print to-day strike me as not only crude and immature, but absolutely mischievous—false, foolish, shallow teaching from those who have never submitted to be taught themselves. I am not afraid of that in your own case, Owen. But remember this, all you young people: nothing can be of real or lasting value that is not founded upon the broad principles of Christianity—charity, self-sacrifice, humility, loving-kindness. One feels that more than ever nowadays, when cynicism is so much in fashion."

The Canon leant back in his chair again with his eyes closed, as though momentarily exhausted by the extraordinary passion with which he had spoken.

So profoundly did Owen Quentillian disagree with his host that he remained absolutely silent. He reminded himself that since his majority he had sought, voluntarily, only the companionship of those whose views were at least as progressive as his own. He had almost forgotten that those other, older views existed, were even held with a passion of sincerity contrasting oddly with the cool, detached, carefully impersonal logic that was the only attitude contemplated by himself and his kind for the consideration of all problems of ethics, morals, or of Life itself.

No doubt the Canon did not admit the normal evolution of the art of self-sacrifice to be self-advertisement, and held the officious pelican to be the best of birds.

Quentillian, horribly aware of his own priggishness,

wanted to reform the whole of the Canon's philosophy at once.

Nevertheless he retained enough humour to hope that the preposterous desire had not been apparent in his silence.

His eyes met those of Valeria Mordard, and read there amusement, and something not unlike protest.

Lucilla, in her level voice, offered him tea.

"The cup that cheers," said Mr. Clover in a nervous way.

The ineptitude roused in Quentillian a disproportionate sense of irritation, and renewed his old conviction that his nerves were not even yet under his complete control.

As though the Canon, too, were mildly averse from such trivialities, he began to speak again.

"What one feels in the cleverness of the day is the note of ugliness that prevails. Do you not feel that? The sordid, the grotesque, the painful—all, all sought out and dwelt upon. That, we are told, is the new realism. We know, indeed, that there is a sad side to life, but is it realism to dwell only upon one side of the picture? Surely, surely a sane optimism were the better outlook—the truer realism."

"You don't think, then, that the optimism of England is responsible for her present plight, sir?"

Quentillian's tone was one of respectful suggestion, but he was aware that Val, beside him, had suddenly caught her breath as though at an audacity, and that Flora and Mr. Clover were both gazing anxiously at the Canon.

A flash of lightning shot from those ardent eyes straight into the passionless irony of the younger man's gaze.

"But for England's optimism, there would be no England to-day. It was the spirit of optimism that won the war, Owen."

A sick recollection of men, armed and disciplined, taking steady aim at other men, standing against a wall to be shot for cowardice or treason, of grey-faced commanders leading those who followed them into certain death, all surged into Quentillian's rebellious mind. They, the men who had been there, had known better than to prate of optimism. They had faced facts, had anticipated disaster, had envisaged the worst possibilities, and their pessimism had won the war.

"Are you, too, bitten with the folly of the day?"

The Canon's voice was gentle again, his arm once more laid across Quentillian's shoulders.

"Did I not hear something about shell-shock, dear fellow? We must have no talk of the war here. Thank God for that He hath brought it to an end. Tell me, dear lad, if you will play tennis?"

Bewildered, almost affronted, Quentillian yet agreed to play tennis, feeling himself more like a forward boy, being treated with forbearance, than like a modern intellectual illuminating the way of thought for the older generation.

He played with Valeria as his partner, and found the Canon's eulogy of her service to be entirely justified.

He found an opportunity at the end of the game of expressing his admiration for her play, and she replied, conventionally enough, that she had a great deal of practice.

"There isn't much else to do," she added, with a slight grimace.

Under pretext of looking for a distant ball, they continued the conversation.

"If you remember this place at all," Val said, "you know how dull it is. Just tennis with the same people every

summer, and horrible bazaars and jumble sales, and never a new person or a new idea from year's end to year's end."

"It sounds appalling. But, after all, you're not bound, in the old, antiquated way. You can go away."

"No, I can't," she said bluntly. "I did get to France, for six months, during the war, but it was only *because* it was the war. And even then—oh, well, the sort of letters I got were enough to make me feel that father really hated my being there."

Quentillian was genuinely aghast.

"But I thought that sort of attitude had gone out with all the other Victorian traditions. I thought women did what they liked—were as free as men."

"That's what it says in the books I read, and what some of the girls I met in France told me. But it isn't like that here. And one *can't* hurt father. You know what he's like—so good, and so sensitive, and—and so noble, somehow. He makes modern things seem trivial—vulgar, even."

"Your father is a reactionary," said Quentillian kindly, if rather as one might say: "Your father is a Hottentot."

"You mustn't think that he just wants me to stay at home and arrange the flowers," Val said. "You know how he always wanted us to have intellectual interests. Oh, Owen, don't you remember the collections?"

She broke off, and blushed and laughed.

"It seems so very natural—I've so often thought of you as Owen."

"That was very nice of you, Val," said Quentillian calmly.

He had every intention of retaining his early privileges where Val was concerned.

"I should like to read some of the things you've written," she said abruptly. "Lucilla reads your articles, and has always admired them."

It seemed to Quentillian so extremely natural that anybody who read his articles should admire them, that he was conscious of receiving a slight shock when Valeria added :

" I gather that my father wouldn't like them at all. Lucilla has always kept them out of his way."

" She is devoted to him, I can see that."

" Yes, of course."

Something in her voice made him look at her, and she exclaimed, half-laughing and half-petulant : " We're all devoted to him, Lucilla and Flossie and I ! I didn't mean the least shadow of a criticism of *him*. Only that it's a little difficult, sometimes, to keep up to his level. . . . "

It seemed to Quentillian so monstrous a state of affairs that the Canon's three daughters should have no worthier aim in life than the one implied, that something of his feeling was reflected in his face, and Valeria on the instant applied herself to look for the missing ball, found it, and returned to the tea-table and the group there.

The Canon was again speaking, this time to young Cuscaden.

" If it is to be Canada, I believe I could give you one or two introductions that might be of service to you. The Government people, for instance. . . . I have one or two very good friends amongst them. You are really anxious to leave the army and try colonisation ? "

" Quite determined to, sir."

" Ah, you young fellows, you young fellows ! It seems to me that there is none of the spirit of stability that existed in our day ! But perhaps the wish to see further afield is a natural one. Certainly my own greatest regret is that I have had so little time for travelling."

He turned to Lucilla.

"Your dearest mother and I had planned a visit to Italy the very year that she was taken from us. Well, well! it was not to be. I shall never see the Eternal City now, I imagine, except with the eyes of the mind. Clover, you are amongst those who have seen Rome. Think of it! Seen Rome, where Peter healed and Paul preached the Gospel, where Laurence and Agnes and Cyprian and countless others were martyred! Tell us something of the Coliseum."

Mr. Clover did not give the effect of being an eloquent person, but he had evidently been called upon before by the Canon, and he gave a not unilluminating little description, punctuated, and indeed supplemented, by Canon Morchard's exhaustive comments.

Quentillian listened in a sort of amazement, not at all untinged by a rather uncertain wonder as to how he should ever sustain his own part in these ingenuous conversations . . . .

The others, he saw, listened—with the possible exception of Lucilla, whose eyes were fixed upon a distant flower-bed.

Captain Cuscaden kept his gaze upon Valeria, but he put in an occasional question, generally upon a subject of architecture. Flora played with a leaf and said nothing at all, and Val, unconsciously, Quentillian felt sure, repeated everything her father said in more colloquial English.

"It amazes me to realise that with a lack of all our modern appliances, such veritable giants of architecture should yet have been raised," mused the Canon.

"Yes, isn't it wonderful to think they had none of our machines and things, and yet made those enormous statues and gates and things?" said Val.

"Well for us indeed that they did so, my child! Every

fresh excavation proves to be a new link with the past."

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Clover.

"Yes, all the new things they dig up seem to make a fresh link with those old Roman days," echoed Val faithfully.

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Clover.

"If any of you young people followed the accounts of the recent Egyptian excavations—Valeria, I think you are our keenest antiquarian—were you not struck by the extraordinary confirmation of Scripture narrative afforded by each fresh discovery?"

This time Mr. Clover only said "Indeed?" and Valeria repeated:

"Yes, it all carried out the things one reads in the Bible, didn't it?"

"We required no such confirmation, certainly, but it comes to one as a fresh joy, and brings these things home with full force."

And Mr. Clover, with what Quentillian perversely chose to regard as misplaced ingenuity, once more found a variation of his formula, and remarked: "Indeed, yes."

On these lines they talked about Egypt.

Then they talked about Rome again.

Then they went back to Egypt.

Quentillian looked at the rebellious profile beneath Val's shady hat, and came to the conclusion that, whether she fully realised it or not, she was as profoundly bored as himself.

It was Captain Cuscaden who released them from the strain, by rising to take his leave.

"I'm sorry you have not seen Adrian. He will be disappointed to have missed you," Canon Morchard said courteously. "Another day, when Adrian is at home, you

must come over again. He is spending the afternoon with friends at a distance, and will hardly be home before dinner-time. You must come over again."

"Thank you, sir, I should like to very much."

Something in the captain's prompt reply convinced Quentillian that his acceptance was not merely a conventional one.

"Your motor-bicycle is round by the hall-door," said Valeria, and she and Captain Cuscaden left the garden together.

"And now, dear lad, you and I must have some talk together."

Rather to Quentillian's dismay, the firm and genial pronouncement of his host seemed to have been anticipated. Lucilla could be discerned bending over the distant flower-bed which had been the object of her solicitude during the talk about Rome, and Flora had disappeared. Mr. Clover now turned and hastened towards the house.

"You and I have had our heart-to-heart talks before now, Owen," said the Canon affectionately. "We must have many more of them, dear fellow—many more."

### (III)

The natural instinct of Quentillian, as of everybody else, was to suppose that a heart-to-heart talk must necessarily be upon the subject of himself.

He was therefore slightly disconcerted, though also undoubtedly relieved, when he perceived that the Canon's thoughts were mainly preoccupied with his own two sons.

They disposed of David with a rapidity partly due to Quentillian's own determined uncommunicativeness, and

partly to the Canon's evident anxiety to get on to the topic of Adrian.

"I wish David had been able to come home before returning to India, but no doubt these things are ordered for us. He writes fondly and affectionately, dear boy—fondly and affectionately. Not as often as I could wish, perhaps, but the young are thoughtless. It costs so little to send one line to those who are anxiously waiting and watching at home! Well, well—it has been a great joy to hear that the dear fellow is his own bright self. And his faith, Owen? Is all well there? Did he say anything to you of that?"

"No, sir."

The Canon sighed.

"Perhaps it was not to be expected. You of the present generation do not discuss these things as we did. Even at Oxford, I am told, the men no longer preoccupy themselves with such questions in the same way."

"Some do, sir," said Quentillian, beginning to feel rather sorry for the Canon.

The Canon, however, received Quentillian's consolatory effort very much at its true worth.

"Some do, perhaps, as you say, but they are not those from whom any very valuable contribution to the problems of the times are to be expected. The tone of Oxford is not what it was, Owen—not what it was. It lessens my disappointment at not sending Adrian there, to find an Alma Mater indeed, as his father before him. One had always thought of the Church for him, dear boy, but these things cannot be forced. His soldiering seems to have put an end to any leanings that way. Adrian is one reason, amongst many others, why I am glad to welcome you amongst us, Owen. He may find it easier to discuss things

with a contemporary," said the Canon wistfully. "Your own destiny, I imagine, is fixed?"

Quentillian assented, although he had thought of the very small property recently inherited by himself in no such grandiloquent terms.

"When do you take possession of your kingdom?"

"In a few months, sir. The place was let during my uncle's lifetime, and there are repairs to be done before I go there. I intend to live there, and try my hand at farming."

He purposely omitted any mention of his writing.

"Good—good—excellent indeed! And we shall not be very distant neighbours, eh?"

"Just the other side of the county, sir. I should like to go over there from here, if you're kind enough to put up with me for two or three days."

"By all means, of course—but let there be no talk of two or three days, Owen, between you and me. Make this your headquarters; come and go quite freely, as one of ourselves. We have always thought of you as one of ourselves," said the Canon warmly. "I think you have no very close ties, this side of the Great Division?"

"Thank you very much indeed," said Quentillian, feeling unable to accept the Great Division even by implication, but sincerely grateful for the Canon's most genuine and spontaneous kindness.

"It's more than good of you to receive me so kindly, and I shall be only too glad to take you at your word."

He wished that his self-consciousness had allowed him to make this speech without a perfectly clear realisation that he only did so because the normal economy of expression habitual to him would have left the elder man dissatisfied.

As it was, the Canon's arm was, for the second time that day, affectionately laid across Quentillian's shoulders, and thus they paced the garden and eventually entered the house, to the extreme relief of the Canon's unresponsive prop.

"Your room, dear Owen. Lucilla is my housekeeper. Ask her for anything you want," said the Canon, carrying Quentillian back to his ninth year, and almost making him expect to hear next that Valeria was the Canon's tomboy.

No such inappropriate piece of information followed, and Quentillian expressed his pleasure at the very charming room in which he found himself.

"Make it your own, dear lad, for as long as you will," and, as though irrepressibly, the Canon added as he closed the door: "Bless you!"

At dinner, Quentillian saw Adrian Mochard. He thought him very like his sister Val, and also very like the little boy who had rehearsed aloud colours for each day of the week.

Adrian spoke of Quentillian's writings, said that he had read some of them, and was instantly and silently disbelieved by the author. The subject was not pursued.

In the drawing-room, later on in the evening, Flora played the piano, and although Quentillian was no musician, he had sufficient knowledge to understand that Flora was one. She played Bach, at the Canon's request, and Debussy at Adrian's. The Canon admitted with a slight, grave smile that he did not admire Debussy.

Valeria occupied herself with needlework, but Lucilla sat with her hands folded until her father said gently:

"Are we to see none of your great tomes to-night, my dear?"

Lucilla rose, and her father explained to the guest:

"There are certain references for a small compilation that I may one day attempt, which Lucilla is kindly looking out for me. You remember her as a very scholarly little girl, no doubt."

The nearest thing Quentillian could compass to this was a very distinct remembrance of having listened to several of the novels of Sir Walter Scott, read aloud by Lucilla, and the Canon looked very much pleased at the reminiscence.

"We are not without our literary evenings now," he declared. "There have been some very pleasant readings and discussions round the lamp on winter evenings—Lucilla provides me with some absorbing book, and Valeria has her strip of embroidery there, and Flora is busy with her pencil. I enjoy a pleasant evening of reading aloud."

The present occasion was not, however, one of reading aloud; nevertheless Quentillian had none of the talk with Valeria that he had half hoped to have.

The Canon's attitude towards his family circle was patriarchal. He sat in an armchair and talked a great deal to Quentillian, and his eyes rested with grave satisfaction upon his children grouped round him.

They remained there until half-past nine, when the Canon read prayers to the assembled household.

"We break up early," he said afterwards to Quentillian. "Lucilla and I have work to do—she is always my right hand. Valeria and Flora, I believe, discuss mysterious questions of *chiffons* upstairs. Do not prolong the conference too late though, my dear ones. I heard voices last night as I came upstairs, which was not as it should be—not as it should be. Owen, dear boy, Adrian will look after you. Good night to you all."

The Canon kissed Val and Flora each on the forehead and laid his hand for an instant upon either head with a

murmur that was evidently an habitual nightly blessing.

Then he went into his study with Lucilla, and Adrian and Quentillian sat in the smoking-room making desultory conversation, that bore not the slightest resemblance to the wide, deep talks of the Canon's forecastings.

The forecastings of the Canon, in fact, like those of many other dominating personalities, were scrupulously carried out in his presence, and thankfully allowed to lapse in his absence.

As of old, it was only Lucilla who was completely at ease in her father's company, and Quentillian presently came to the conclusion that her silence, her unemotional acquiescences, denoted a mind that was merely a reflection of his.

Flora, remote, gentle, preoccupied with her music, gave him the odd illusion of being slightly withdrawn from them all.

Only in Valeria were to be discerned suppressed, but unmistakable, flashes of rebellion, and with Valeria, Quentillian, as usual scrutinising his own impressions under a microscope, presently suspected himself of falling quietly in love.

In common with most young men of his day, Quentillian considered himself to have outlived passion. In effect, the absorbing episode of his young manhood was in fact over, and Val, ingenuous and beautiful, was unconsciously provocative of the normal reaction.

One night she joined Adrian and Quentillian in the smoking-room, after the Canon's usual disappearance into his study.

With a look half-frightened and half-mischiefous, she lit a cigarette.

Adrian laughed.

"Don't look so guilty, Val. It isn't a crime, and besides, no one will know."

Val coloured in a childish way, and said to Quentillian:

"My father knows that I smoke—at least, I think he knows, in a sort of way. He doesn't like it, and that's why I don't do it in front of him," she concluded naïvely.

"You're wrong, Val," said Adrian. "You and Flossie ought to assert yourselves more. It would make it much easier for me if you did. Father's ideas about women are so old-fashioned, one can't introduce him to any of one's friends."

Quentillian exchanged a glance with Valeria. It required small acumen to translate the plurality of Adrian's "friends" into the singular, and the feminine singular at that.

"Father is very broad-minded," said Valeria conscientiously. "He never says that smoking is wrong, only that it's unfeminine."

"It isn't anything of the sort," Adrian declared with the most astonishing violence. "Some people—girls—require it for their nerves. It soothes them. It doesn't make them in the least unfeminine. I met a girl the other day—you'd have liked her awfully, Val—and she simply smoked *perfectly* naturally, the whole time, just like a man."

"Who was she?" enquired Val smoothly.

"Let me see—what was her name now?"

This time Quentillian avoided Valeria's eyes, positively abashed by the extreme hollowness of Adrian's pretence at forgetfulness.

"Oh, yes, Olga Duffle—Miss Olga Duffle. She is staying with the Admastons—the people I was with the day you arrived, Owen. Don't you think you girls might ask them all over to tennis, one of these days?"

"I suppose so—yes, of course we will. Would father like Miss Duffle? He doesn't much care for the Admastons, does he?"

"Absolute prejudice, my dear girl. You've got into a rut, all you people down here—that's what you've done. You'd like Olga most awfully—everybody does. She's the most popular girl in London, and not a bit spoilt, although she's an only child and her people adore her. Mrs. Duffle told me herself that Olga was just like a ray of sunshine at home."

"What an original woman Mrs. Duffle must be!" murmured Val.

"I always think there must be something remarkable about any girl, if her own nearest relations speak well of her," Quentillian said in detached accents.

Adrian looked suspiciously at his audience.

"You'd like Olga awfully," he repeated rather pathetically. "And I can tell you this, Val, she'd give you and Flossie no end of hints about clothes and things. She dresses better than any girl I've ever seen."

Valeria was roused to no display of enthusiasm by this culminating claim of Miss Duffle on her regard.

"What sort of age is she?"

"She looks about eighteen, but I believe she's twenty-four and a bit," said Adrian with some precision. "She plays tennis too rippling. You'd better ask the Admastons to bring her over, I can tell you. It isn't everyone who gets the chance of playing with a girl like that."

"We might have a tennis-party next week," Val considered. "I shall only ask one Admaston girl, we've too many girls as it is. One Admaston, and this Olga person, and Lucilla and I—Flossie won't play if anybody very good is there—that's four, and then you and Owen and Mr.

Clover—and we could have Captain Cuscaden. I'll talk to Lucilla about it, if you like, Adrian."

"Oh, I don't care about it. It's for your own sake, really, that I suggested it," Adrian explained.

His forefinger carefully traced out the pattern stamped upon the leather arm of his chair, and he contemplated it earnestly with his head upon one side, even murmuring a sub-audible, "One—two—three—and a corner" before clearing his throat.

"H'm. No, my dear Val, don't run away with the idea that I'm wildly keen on this tennis stunt for my own amusement. In fact, I may say I've been a bit off tennis lately, simply from seeing how extraordinarily good some amateurs can be. It discourages one, in a way. But I thought you girls might like to know Olga, I must say. She'd be an awfully nice friend for you to have, you know."

There was a pleading note discernible in the tone of Adrian's philanthropic suggestions that might have been partly accountable for the tolerance with which his sister received them.

Nevertheless she said to Quentillian next day, with a certain hint of apology:

"We've spoilt Adrian, I'm afraid. You remember what a dear little boy he was?"

Quentillian remembered better still what a tiresome little boy Adrian had been, but this recollection, as so many others connected with the house of Mordard, he did not insist upon.

"I suppose he must have this Olga if he wants to, but I hope she's a nice girl. You know how very particular father is, and I think he's especially sensitive where Adrian is concerned."

"It struck me that perhaps he was almost inclined to

take Adrian's affairs too seriously," Quentillian suggested, with great moderation. "Adrian, after all, is very young, isn't he, both in years and in character, in spite of his soldiering?"

"I suppose he is. He's very susceptible too. I sometimes think that father doesn't altogether make allowance for that."

Even the very negative criticism implied was so contrary to the spirit of the house that it gave Quentillian the agreeable illusion of partnering Valeria in a mild domestic conspiracy, and pleased him inordinately.

The sense of conspiracy was deepened on the day of the tennis-party, when a Miss Admaston, gawky and unimpressive, duly escorted Miss Olga Duffle to St. Gwenllian.

She was less pretty and possessed of more personality than Quentillian had expected. Very small and slight, her face was of the squirrel type, her eyes very large and dark, her black *avépé* hair brushed childishly away from her little round forehead, her nose unmistakably *retroussé*. Two very white front teeth were just visible resting upon an habitually indrawn underlip.

Quentillian, quite irrationally, immediately felt certain that she spoke with a lisp. She did not, but she certainly pronounced the name of Captain George Cuscaden, with whom she appeared to be upon intimate terms, as though it were spelt "Dzorze."

She also called Adrian by his first name, but gave no other startling signs of modernity. Indeed, a very pretty, and most unmodern, deference marked her manner towards Canon M orchard.

"Father likes her," Valeria murmured to Quentillian, who was more concerned with her charming air of imparting

to him a secret than with Miss Duffle's conquest of the Canon.

It was only at tea-time that the Canon joined the tennis-party. Immediately afterwards he made courteous apologies and returned to the house.

It was undeniable that the absence of the Canon caused the conversation, which had circled uneasily round cathedral subjects, to lapse into triviality. The super-critical Quentillian could not decide which form of social intercourse he found least to his taste.

"Jam?" said Adrian.

The Canon had said, a few minutes earlier :

"You must try some of our strawberry jam, Miss Duffle. My daughter Flora is responsible for it, I believe. Lucilla there is our housekeeper, but I am given to understand that her younger sisters are allowed to try experiments. I will not quote: *Fiat experimentum.*"

"Jam?" repeated Adrian.

"Oh, there's a wasp in the jam! Oh, save me!"

Olga laughed as she uttered little cries of alarm, and her laughter really suggested the adjective "merry." "Save the women and children!"

There was much ineffectual slapping of tea-spoons against the air, the tablecloth, the jam-pot, and many exclamations.

"Yonder he goes! Passed to you for necessary action, Miss Admaston!"

"Be a man, Cuscaden—he's right under your nose!"

"Dzorze, do be careful—you'll get stung!" Olga cried across the table.

Captain Cuscaden neatly captured the wasp beneath an empty cup.

"That's got him. He'll never lift up his head again."

"Oh, then may I have my jam?"

Olga, with her head on one side, might have been imitating a little girl, but Quentillian could not decide whether or no the imitation was an unconscious one.

"The wasp has eaten all the jam," Adrian rejoined, in the same tone as Olga's.

"Oh, he hasn't eaten all of it!"

"No, he hasn't eaten it all."

"Oh, the wasp didn't eat all the jam, did he?"

"Not quite all."

"There are still a few spoonfuls left that the wasp didn't eat, Miss Duffle."

Neither Olga, Adrian, Captain Cuscaden, Flora, nor Miss Admaston appeared to regard themselves as being amongst the extremest examples of brainless fatuity produced by a fatuous century. Yet thus it was that Owen Quentillian was regarding them, whilst at the same time another section of his brain passionately registered the conviction that his nerves were still on edge and his tendency to irrational irritability passing almost beyond his own control.

After tea he remained idly in a long chair beside Valeria, while they watched Olga's little nimble figure on the tennis-court, where Adrian was her partner. Lucilla played against them with George Cuscaden, and Olga several times called out gaily: "Dzorze, I hate you!"

When Lucilla sent an unplayable stroke across the net, she only cried: "Oh, well played!"

"I don't like her voice, do you?" Val murmured confidentially.

"Hideous," said Quentillian, briefly and candidly.

"I wonder if Adrian thinks he's in earnest. Of course, I don't suppose she'd look at him. And of course he

couldn't think of marrying anybody for ages—he's too young, and he'd have to get a job."

"He'll have to do that anyway, won't he? He says he doesn't dislike the idea of business, and I could give him an introduction to a man who might be useful."

"It's very kind of you. I know father wants to get him settled. Dear father, he was so disappointed that Adrian isn't going into the Church after all, and he's taken it so beautifully."

Quentillian regarded the Canon's disappointment with so much more astonishment than sympathy that he wished only to avoid a discussion on the beauty of its manifestation.

"Curiously enough, I have a living in my gift, belonging to my very small property at Stear. The old man there wishes to retire, and I want to consult your father as to a new appointment. No one could be less fitted than myself," said Quentillian, with an emphasis not altogether devoid of satisfaction, "to nominate a candidate for that sort of thing."

Val looked at him with all her peculiar directness of gaze.

"Sometimes you talk as though you rather despised the Church," she said bluntly.

There was a pause.

"If I have given you such an impression, I must apologise. It was most discourteous of me," said Quentillian stiffly.

He was fully prepared to acknowledge and to defend his own purely rationalistic views, but the implication of a lack of taste in his behaviour as guest in an orthodox household offended him.

"I didn't mean that," said Val, calmly and gravely. "I know that a great many very clever people are not

believers in the sense that my father is one, for instance, but they do respect the Christian ideal, all the same. I only wondered whether you were one of them. Do you mind my talking like this ? "

The relentless voice of Quentillian's inner monitor assured him that he was, on the contrary, ready to welcome any intimate discussion of himself and his views on whatever subject.

Val looked at him expectantly.

" Where I differ from, for instance, your father, is in separating Christian morality from what might be called the miraculous element of Christianity. Frankly, I can't accept the latter."

" You don't believe in the divinity of Christ ? "

Her voice was a very much shocked one, and Quentillian replied only by a gesture. Val kept silence, and presently he glanced at her face and saw that tears stood in her eyes.

He was half touched and half impatient.

" Surely that point of view isn't altogether a new one to you ? You must know that the trend of modern thought is all very much in that direction."

" I suppose I knew it, certainly. But it has never come very near me before. Father has sheltered us from everything, in the most beautiful way."

She spoke very simply and sincerely.

The time-honoured *cliché* as to never wishing to deprive anyone of his or her faith—Valeria least of all—hung unspoken on his lips.

If the spiritual intimacy of which Owen Quentillian was beginning to dream should come to pass between them, he was quite clearly and definitely convinced that Valeria's early beliefs must go.

"Have you really never felt any doubt at all—any inclination to question?"

Valeria looked troubled.

"I suppose I've never thought it out very clearly. One doesn't, you know, brought up as we were."

Her eyes were full of thought.

"Tell me," said Quentillian gently, after a silence.

"I was hoping," said Val, with innocent eyes turned full upon him, "that father would never know about *you*. It would make him so unhappy."

(IV)

Val, in accordance with time-honoured tradition, nightly brushed out her long brown hair in her sister Flora's bedroom.

They talked desultorily.

"Choir practice to-morrow—I wish we could have Plain Chant instead of those things. . . ."

"Father doesn't care for Plain Chant."

"I know."

"Give me a piece of ribbon, Flossie. I've lost all mine."

"Val—here, will blue do?—Val, do you think Owen is falling in love with you?"

"I don't know. Well, to be honest, I think he is."

"So do I."

"That's Lucilla going up to bed. How early they are to-night."

They heard the Canon's voice upon the stairs outside.

"Good-night to you, my dear daughter. May God have you in His keeping!"

Then came a gentle tap upon the bedroom door.

"Not *too* prolonged a conference, little girls! I have sent Lucilla to seek her bed."

"Good-night, father," they chorused.

"Good-night to you, my dear children. Good-night, and may God bless you."

"Father would be pleased."

Flora reverted, unmistakably, to the topic of Owen Quentillian.

"I suppose so," said Val doubtfully.

"But you know he would! He is delighted with Owen, and it would be so close to us—only an hour's journey. I think it would be very nice, Val," said Flora wistfully, "and it's time one of us got married. Lucilla won't, now, and nobody ever asks me, so it had better be you."

They both laughed.

"Nobody has ever asked *me*, except that curate we had before Mr. Clover, and I always thought he was more or less weak-minded," Valeria remarked candidly.

"They may not have asked you, but they've wanted to," said Flora shrewdly. "Don't answer if you'd rather not, but didn't Captain Cuscaden ever? . . ."

Val crimsoned suddenly.

"No. That was all nonsense. I believe he's in love with that Olga girl."

"After you? Oh, Val!"

"I don't suppose it was ever me at all," said Val, with averted head. "I can't think why we ever imagined such nonsense. Anyway, it's all over now, and I—I think I rather hate him, now."

"Oh!" Flora's tone was both highly dissatisfied and rather incredulous.

"One can't hate a person and—and like them, at one and the same time," Valeria exclaimed, with all the

vehement of those who affirm that of which they are not convinced.

"I suppose not. See if you can untie me, Val—I've got into a knot."

There was silence, and then Valeria, without looking at her sister, suddenly said:

"Sometimes I wish we'd been brought up more like other people, Flossie. I know father's care for us has been beautiful—dear father!—but somehow the girls I was with in France seemed more alive, in a way. They knew about things. . . ."

"Isn't that rather like Eve wanting the knowledge of good and evil? Father always says that one should only seek the beautiful side—'whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are holy,' like St. Paul says."

"Owen wouldn't agree to that. He believes that one ought to know everything, good and bad alike."

"Perhaps it's different for a man."

"Perhaps. We don't know much about men, after all, do we, Flossie? "

Flossie raised her eyebrows with an indescribable effect of fastidious distaste, and closed her lips.

"I don't think I want to, particularly. "Father is the most wonderful man that anyone could ever want to know, I should imagine."

"Oh yes," said Valeria.

She was perfectly conscious of speaking anything but wholeheartedly.

She did indeed think her father wonderful, but she could not, like Flora, feel herself to be for ever satisfied by the contemplation of parental wonderfulness.

"You're different since you came back from France, Val. I think you'd better marry Owen," said Flora calmly.

"He hasn't asked me yet."

There was a sound from the floor below.

"That was father! He hates us to sit up late. I'd better go before he comes up again. Good-night, Flossie."

"Good-night."

Flora looked at her sister, and once more murmured: "Father would like it, you know," half pleadingly and half as though in rebuke.

"Father doesn't know everything about Owen. He has been very much affected by the tone of the day, as father calls it. His faith . . ."

"Oh, Val! Isn't that one reason the more? You might do so much to help him."

Flora spoke with humourless and absolute earnestness.

"Valeria!"

The Canon's voice, subdued but distinct, came to them from without.

"My dear, go to your room. This is not right. You are acting in defiance of my known wishes, although, no doubt, thoughtlessly. Bid your sister good-night and go."

Val did not even wait to carry out the first half of the Canon's injunction. She caught up her brush and comb and left the room.

"Are my wishes so little to you, Valeria?" said her father, standing on the stairs. "It costs so small an act of self-sacrifice to be faithful in that which is least!"

"I'm sorry, father. We both forgot the time."

"Thoughtless Valeria! Are you always to be my mad-cap daughter?"

His tone was very fond, and he kissed her and blessed her once more.

Valeria went to her own room.

She sat upon the side of her bed and cried a little.

Everything seemed to be vaguely disappointing and unsatisfactory. What if Owen Quentillian was in love with her? He was very clever, and Val was tired of cleverness. Father was clever, even Flora, in her austere, musical way, was clever. Val supposed grimly that she herself must be clever, if imposed intellectual interests, a wide range of reading, a habit of abstract discussion, could make her so. Nevertheless she was guiltily conscious of desires within herself other than purely academic ones.

Flora was right. Those six months in France had made her different.

She had worked in a canteen, where the preoccupation of everyone had been the procuring and dispensing of primitive things—food, and drink, and warmth. Women had worked with their hands, for men who had been fighting, and were going to fight again.

Valeria had been the quickest worker there, one of the most efficient. The manual work, the close contact with material things, had satisfied some craving within herself of which she had not before been actively conscious.

She had learnt to cook, and had become proficient with astonishing ease. Scrambled eggs interested her more than herbaceous borders, more than choir practices, more, to her own surprise and shame, than evening readings-aloud at home.

The canteen jokes, elementary, beer-and-tobacco-flavoured, had amused her whole-heartedly. She had laughed, foolishly and mirthfully, for sheer enjoyment, knowing all the time that, judged by the criterion of St. Gwenllian, the jests were pointless, the wit undeserving of the name.

Very soon she had ceased to dwell upon any remembrance of the criterion of St. Gwenllian. She had let herself go.

There had been brief, giggling intimacies with girls and young women whom Valeria could certainly not visualise as intimates in her own home, allusions and catchwords shared with the men or the orderlies, childish, undignified escapades which she was aware that the Canon would have regarded and apostrophised as vulgar. Those days now seemed like a dream.

Even the girl with whom she had shared a room for six months no longer wrote to her.

She, the bobbed-haired, twenty-two-year-old Pollie Gordon, had had love-affairs. Valeria remembered certain confidences made by Pollie, and still blushed. Pollie had been strangely outspoken, to Miss Mordard's way of thinking, but she had been interesting—revealing, even.

Valeria, ruefully, realised perfectly that Pollie Gordon, whether one's taste approved of her or not, had lived every moment of her short life to the full. She was acutely aware of contrast.

"And I'm twenty-seven!" thought Val. "I'd better go and be a cook somewhere. If only I could! Or marry Owen—supposing he asks me. Anyway, one might have children."

A humorous wonder crossed her mind as to her ability to cope with the ultra-intelligent, eclectically-minded children, that Owen Quentillian might be expected to father.

"It's a pity he isn't poor. I believe I should be better as a poor man's wife, having to do everything for him, and for the babies—if there were babies . . . the Colonies, for instance. . . ."

Although she was alone, Val coloured again, and tears stood in her eyes.

"What a fool I am!"

It was this painfully sincere conviction that sent her to seek the oblivion of sleep, rather than any recollection of the fidelity in that which is least, enjoined upon her by her father.

For the next few days Valeria was zealous in gardening and tennis-playing. She also, on two occasions, fetched volumes of Lamartine, and asked her father to read aloud after dinner.

Her physical exertions sent her to bed tired and made her sleep soundly.

It surprised her very much when Lucilla, who never made personal remarks, said to her :

"Why don't you go away for a time, Val? You don't look well."

"I'm perfectly all right. I only wish I had rather more to do sometimes."

Valeria looked at her elder sister. She was less intimate with her than with Flora. No one, in fact, was intimate with Lucilla. She spoke seldom, and almost always impersonally. At least, one knew that she was discreet. . . .

Val, on impulse, spoke.

"Do you suppose—don't be horrified, Lucilla—do you suppose father would ever think of letting me go away and work?"

Lucilla gave no sign of being horrified.

She appeared to weigh her answer before she replied.

"I don't think it would occur to him, of his own accord."

"Oh no. But if one asked him? Would it make him dreadfully unhappy?"

"Yes," said Lucilla matter-of-factly.

Valeria, disappointed and rather angry, shrugged her shoulders.

"Then, of course, that puts an end to the whole thing."

Lucilla finished stamping a small pile of the Canon's letters, laid them on the table, and placed a paper-weight upon the heap before turning round to face her sister.

"But why, Val?"

"Why what?"

"Why need it put an end to the whole thing? You know as well as I do that it would make father unhappy for any one of us to suggest leaving home. But if you really mean to do it, you must make up your mind to his being unhappy about it."

"Lucilla!"

Lucilla did not elaborate her astounding theses, but her gaze, sustained and level, met Valeria's astonished eyes calmly.

"You don't suppose I'm as hideously selfish as that, do you?"

"I don't know what you are. But you've a right to your own life."

"Not at anyone else's expense."

Lucilla began to stamp postcards.

"Lucilla, you didn't mean that, did you?"

"Of course I did, Val."

"That I should hurt *father*, and go away just to satisfy my own restlessness, knowing that he disapproved, and was unhappy? I should never know a moment's peace again."

"Well, if you feel like that, I suppose you won't do it."

"Wouldn't you feel like that, in my place?"

"No, I shouldn't, but that's neither here nor there. It's for you to decide whether a practical consideration or a sentimental one weighs most in your own particular case."

"Sentimental?"

Val's indignant tone gave the word its least agreeable meaning.

"It is a question of sentiment, isn't it? Father likes to have you at home, but he's not dependent upon you in any way."

"But wouldn't he say that my place was at home—that it was only restlessness and love of independence? . . ." Valeria stammered.

She suddenly felt very young beneath the remote, passionless gaze of her sister. For the first time in her life she saw Lucilla as a human being and not as an elder sister, and she was struck with Lucilla's strange effect of spiritual aloofness. It would be very easy to speak freely to anyone as impersonal as Lucilla.

"It's ever since I got back from France," said Val suddenly. "I don't know what's the matter with me, exactly, but I've . . . wanted things. I've wanted to work quite hard, at things like cooking, or sweeping—and I've been sick of books, and music, and botany. I don't feel any of it is one scrap worth while. And oh, Lucilla, it's such nonsense, because no one wants me to cook or sweep, so I'm just 'seeking vocations to which I am not called,' as father always says. Perhaps it's just that I want change."

Lucilla was silent.

"Do say what you think," Val besought her with some impatience.

"I will if you like, but it isn't really what I think, or what father thinks, that matters. It's what you think yourself."

Valeria stamped her foot.

"I don't *know* what I think."

“ Better go away,” Lucilla then said briefly.

“ Work ? ”

“ Yes, if that’s what you feel like. Of course, marriage would be better.”

“ Lucilla ! ”

“ You asked me to say what I thought,” her sister pointed out.

“ I suppose you mean Owen Quentillian,” Val said at last. “ But even if I did that—and he hasn’t asked me to, so far—it would only mean just the same sort of thing, only in another house. There’d be servants to do the real work, and a gardener to do the garden, and a nurse for the babies, if there were babies. Owen talks about farming Stear, but he’d do it all out of books, I feel certain. We should be frightfully—frightfully civilised.”

“ Owen *is* frightfully civilised.”

“ Well, I don’t think I am,” said Val contentiously.

“ Lucilla, do you like Owen ? ”

“ Yes. I’m very sorry for him too.”

“ Why ? ” Valeria could not believe that Owen would be in the least grateful for Lucilla’s sorrow. It might even be difficult to induce him to believe that anyone could be sufficiently officious to indulge in such an emotion on his behalf.

“ I think his shell-shock has affected him much more than he realises,” Lucilla said. “ I think his nerves are on edge, very often. He’d be a difficult person to live with, Val.”

Valeria remained thoughtful.

She knew that Lucilla’s judgments, if rarely put into words, were extraordinarily clear-cut and definite, and as such they carried conviction to her own intuitive, emotional impulses of like and dislike.

"Father likes Owen so much. Wouldn't he be pleased if one ever did?" Val said elliptically.

"Very pleased, I should think."

"Of course, that isn't really a reason for doing it."

Lucilla apparently found the wisdom of her sister's observation too obvious for reply.

"Not the only reason, anyway."

Lucilla's silence was again an assent.

"Gossiping in the morning, my daughters?"

The Canon's deep, pleasant voice preceded him as he paused outside the open window.

"Is that as it should be? Lucilla, my dear love, at your desk again? You look pale—you should be in the open air. Is not the day a glorious one? When this world about us is so unutterably fair, does it not make one think of 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what things He hath prepared for them that love Him'?"

The Canon's uplifted gaze was as joyful as it was earnest.

"Heaven seems very near, on such a day," he said softly.

Val, always outspoken, and struggling with the unease of her own discontent, joined him at the window and said wistfully:

"I can't feel it like you do, father. I wish I could."

"Little Valeria! It will come, my dear, it will all come. These things become more real and vivid to us as life goes on. So many of those I love have gone to swell the ranks of the Church Triumphant, now—such a goodly company of friends! How can I feel it to be a strange or far-away country, when your mother awaits me there, and my own dear father and mother, and such a host of friends? What a meeting that will be, with no shadow of parting any more!"

Valeria was conscious of foolish, utterly unexplained tears rising to her throat at the tender, trustful voice in which her father spoke.

How she loved him ! Never could she do anything that would hurt or disappoint him. The resolution, impulsive and emotional, gave her a certain sense of stability, welcome after all her chaotic self-questionings and contradictory determinations.

" Will you give Owen and myself the pleasure of your company this afternoon, Valeria ? We meditate an expedition to Stear—an expedition to Stear."

She said that she would go with them.

None of the Canon's children had ever refused an invitation to go out with the Canon since the days when the Sunday afternoons of their childhood had been marked by the recurrent honour of a walk with father. An honour and a pleasure, even if rather a breathless one, and one that moreover was occasionally liable to end in shattering disaster, as when Flora had been sent home in disgrace by herself for the misguided sense of humour that had led her, aged five, to put out her tongue at the curate. Or that other, unforgettable episode, when Val herself, teased by the boys, had vigorously boxed Adrian's ears.

She smiled as she recollect ed it, and wondered if Owen remembered too—and yet there was a sort of disloyalty in recalling the affair too closely.

The Canon had been so *very* angry ! His anger, as rare as it was memorable, had been succeeded by such a prolonged period of the blackest depression !

Val realised thankfully that it was a long time since any of them had seen the Canon angry.

She turned aimlessly down the garden.

The Canon had already gone indoors. He was never

otherwise than occupied, and Valeria had never seen him impatient of an interruption.

“ ‘The man who wants me, is the man I want,’ ” the Canon sometimes quoted, with his wonderfully attractive smile.

“ Father *is* wonderful: *Never* could I disappoint or grieve him,” thought Val vehemently.

She suddenly wheeled round and returned to the open window, determined that Lucilla, the astonishing Lucilla, should know of her resolution.

“ You know what we were talking about just now? ” she demanded abruptly.

Lucilla looked up.

“ I’ve quite made up my mind that your advice was wrong,” said Val firmly. “ I know you said what you thought was best, and it’s nice of you to want me to be independent, but, after all, one’s duty comes first. I don’t believe it’s my duty to dash away from home and make father unhappy.”

Lucilla looked down again. . . .

“ Of course, if anything happened *of itself* to make me leave home, it would be quite different. If I married, or anything like that. But just to go away for a purely selfish whim . . . ”

She paused expressively.

“ I couldn’t do it, you know.”

“ Well—— ” Lucilla’s tone conceded, apparently, that Val had every right to judge for herself. Further than that it did not go.

“ Lucilla, if you really think like that, about living one’s own life—and I suppose, from the aggravating way in which you won’t say anything, that you do—why don’t you do it yourself? ”

"But I haven't any wish to," said Lucilla, looking surprised.

"Haven't you ever had any wish to?"

"Oh yes, once. But not now."

"Then why didn't you?" Val pursued desperately. She felt as though she was coming really to know her sister for the first time.

"I suppose because I thought like you—that it wouldn't do to leave father."

"But you don't think that any more?"

"No."

"Did anyone advise you?"

"Oh no. There wasn't anything to advise about. One has to think things out for oneself, after all."

"Oh!" Val was conscious of her own perpetual craving for approval from everyone, for any course that she might adopt.

"Did you ever ask anyone's advice, Lucilla?"

"I don't think so. If I did, it would be because I meant to take it, and I can't imagine wanting to let anyone else decide things for me. Just talking about one's own affairs isn't taking advice, though people like to call it so."

"I think it's a very good thing you're not married," said Val crossly. "You're too superior."

"Perhaps that's why no one has ever asked me," said Miss Mordard with calm.

Valeria, in spite of her momentary elevation of spirits in resolving never to grieve her father, prepared for the visit to Stear in a discontented frame of mind.

At the last moment Adrian suddenly announced a wish to accompany them.

"My dear! But of course!" The Canon's pleasure was

very evident. "Owen, you will welcome this lad of mine as part of our little excursion, eh ? Why not make one of our old-time family parties ? Why not let us all go and explore this future home of Owen's ? It's not very often that I have a free afternoon nowadays—and to have all my dear ones to make holiday with me would be indeed a rare joy."

He looked round him expectantly.

"The caretaker won't be able to manage tea for so many," said Lucilla, looking at Quentillian.

"There speaks my practical housekeeper !

'For though on pleasure she was bent,  
She had a frugal mind.'

Eh, Lucilla ? Could you not contrive a basket for us, my dear—picnic fashion ? Come, come, let us have an impromptu picnic. What say you, young people ? "

They said what the Canon wanted them to say. No one, Val felt, could have done otherwise, in the face of his eagerness. She was partly disappointed, and partly relieved. There had been a certain romance in going with Owen to see Owen's home, with the barely-acknowledged wonder whether it might not one day also be hers.

But there was no hint of romance in the solidly-packed basket presently produced by Lucilla, and reluctantly carried by Adrian, nor in Flora's tardiness that nearly caused them to miss the train, nor in her father's gentle, humorously-worded rebuke to her. . . .

(v)

If Valeria was slightly discomposed by the tribal nature of the expedition to Stear, Quentillian was seriously annoyed by it. He had figured to himself a grave and gentle readjustment of values, when he should see the place that he had known since boyhood transformed into a setting for the figure of Valeria.

He did not suppose himself to be tempestuously in love, but he had made up his mind that he greatly wished to marry Valeria.

A wistful uncertainty possessed him as to whether Valeria would wish to marry him.

Stear looked forlorn and uninhabited, and the repairs were even less advanced than Quentillian had expected them to be.

He reflected that he ought to be upon the spot, and shuddered involuntarily, and to his disgust, at the lonely prospect.

Since his shell-shock, he had very often been afraid of his own company, and the knowledge was peculiarly galling.

"Your lines have fallen to you in pleasant places, Owen," said the Canon genially.

"You are optimistic, sir," said Quentillian rather dryly. "It will be months before these men are out of the place."

"You should move in yourself," Lucilla suggested.

"I believe I should."

"Thoughtless Lucilla! Why should Owen leave his present quarters, if he is happy with us, as I trust he is? Aye, dear Owen, you are very welcome at St. Gwenllian whilst your own nest is being prepared for you."

The Canon's ready hand sought Quentillian's arm.

Owen glanced at Lucilla half apologetically, but her gaze, impervious to subtleties and mildly cheerful, met his very readily.

"Please stay on with us, if you should care to."

"Thank you," said Quentillian noncommittally.

Later, at the Canon's suggestion, he took them to visit the church.

"You have the responsibility of finding a new shepherd for the flock here, I understand, Owen?"

"I was hoping for some advice from you, sir."

"Aye, indeed? It's a very good living, is it not, though that is very far from being the first consideration—very far indeed."

"What's it worth?" Adrian enquired.

"I believe it's considered worth about seven hundred a year."

"A job for a married man," said Adrian casually.

An involuntary flash of amused comprehension passed between Quentillian and Valeria. He understood it to be in reference to this when she said to him in a low voice on leaving the church:

"I don't think Olga Duffle would make a clergyman's wife, do you?"

"I should doubt it."

"But Adrian couldn't really be thinking of it."

"I thought he'd decided against the Church."

"So he has. I think it was one of the greatest disappointments father has ever had."

"Your father would only have wished it if Adrian had wished it."

"Oh yes," said Val emphatically. "Naturally, he

looks upon it as a question of vocation. Father is the last person to ignore that."

She hesitated, and then said: "Owen, do you believe that everyone has a vocation?"

The question, to him so oddly reminiscent of the perplexities of a bygone age, nearly made him laugh, but his amusement was wholly tender.

"I don't believe in a special vocation straight from Heaven for each one of us," he admitted. "You know, I never *can* believe that Heaven takes that acute personal interest in individuals that religious people always emphasise when they're talking about themselves. But of course there are certain lines of development—"

"I think," Val said seriously, "that I should like to feel I had a definite job in life that no one but myself could do. I feel so—*indefinite*."

"I believe I might enlighten you on that subject," Owen replied in measured accents.

"I don't mean sales of work or a botanical collection, Owen."

"I know you don't. The sales of work and the collections were never a means of self-expression, were they?"

"They did stand for something, though."

"For your wish to please somebody else?"

"The wish is still there, Owen."

"Val, you know I think self-abnegation is all wrong."

He was half-laughing, but the flushed face that she turned towards him was altogether earnest.

"Don't think me arrogant, Val, but I do so wish I could make you see it as I do. Don't you see that the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice was only the swing of the pendulum, from the brutal old days when men rejoiced in seeing their fellow-creatures tortured and killed? Feelings had to

be developed, and so the Sermon on the Mount was preached. The pendulum has swung too far the other way now—charity has come to mean self-advertisement or sentimentality."

Quentillian, deeply interested in his own exposition of views that were by no means new to him, was brought up short by a call from behind.

"Hi, Owen! Are you walking for a wager? I want to ask you something."

Quentillian, not at all disposed to welcome Adrian and his interrogations, was obliged to slacken his steps, as Valeria did hers.

Adrian was switching at the long grasses on either side of the road with a slender length of ash.

"Look here, old man, have you got anybody in your eye for that living?"

Adrian's head was studiously turned towards his degradations with the ash-stick.

"Because if you haven't—not that it matters to me, particularly, you understand—but I've got a friend who might be the man you want."

"Who is he?"

"I should have to sound him first," Adrian explained. "I suppose you'd want a youngish fellow and—and I suppose you'd rather he was married?"

"Not in the least."

Adrian looked disturbed.

"I thought a parson's wife was useful in a large, straggling sort of place like this. Not that it matters to me."

"Is your friend married, Adrian?" Val enquired.

Quentillian could not decide whether the simplicity of her manner was ironical or not.

"He isn't married at present. I think he's engaged."

You see, a living like this would justify a man in getting married, wouldn't it ? "

" It would depend on the sort of person he wished to marry."

" Supposing she had a little money of her own ? "

" The sort of girls who marry clergymen never do have money of their own," said Quentillian firmly.

On this discouraging pronouncement they were rejoined by the rest of the party.

Nevertheless Valeria contrived to enquire of Quentillian in a disturbed murmur :

" What *can* Adrian be thinking of ? "

It was not at all difficult to guess what Adrian could be thinking of, and became still less so as the days slipped by and his infatuation for Miss Olga Duffle led to her inclusion in innumerable games of tennis and impromptu tea-parties at St. Gwenllian.

" What can he *see* in her ? " Valeria demanded, after the fashion of sisters.

Quentillian was unable to provide any adequate explanation of the phenomenon, but he was fully prepared to discuss it, and prolong thereby the sense of intimacy with Valeria.

It seemed to Quentillian that a new, slight tinge of gravity shadowed Valeria's frankness.

With all the logic and consistency of most persons so situated, Quentillian alternately viewed this as being hopeful, or unhopeful, in the extreme, for the fulfilment of his wishes.

He was slightly amused at finding himself in the extremely conventional position in which he had so often viewed, with dispassionate distaste, the spectacle presented by other men, and this amusement was not without its share in determining him to submit his proposal to Valeria in writing.

A tendency, real, or fancied by Quentillian's self-consciousness, on the parts of Flora and Adrian at least, to vacate any room in which he and Valeria might be, upon excuses of a shadow-like transparency, finally brought Quentillian to the point of leaving St. Gwenllian, under promise of an early return..

"You must come back to us; dear Owen—you must come back," the Canon repeated. "I want many a talk with you yet, and Adrian here will miss the evening confabulations in the smoking-room—eh, Adrian? Stear will hardly be ready for you yet awhile, to our advantage be it spoken, so you must make your home with us in the meanwhile. Come and go quite freely, dear lad."

"Thank you very much."

Quentillian felt that he had said these words too often, and conscientiously sought to vary the formula.

"It's been a delightful time altogether, and I'm more than grateful. It's been wonderful to get such a kind welcome after these years abroad."

"Ah, dear fellow!"

The Canon's fine face softened as he laid his arm across the younger man's shoulders.

"Never doubt your welcome here, Owen," he said.

Owen suspected significance in the words, and then derided himself.

Whatever his certainties as regarded the Canon, it was with Valeria that Quentillian was concerned, and he could auger nothing from her frank and cordial regret at his departure.

"I shall write to you, Val."

"Yes, do. And I'll tell you what happens with Adrian and that Olga."

"I hope nothing will happen."

"Oh no—but it's amusing."

She did not look amused. Something of her ripe-apricot bloom had faded, and there were shadows beneath her brown eyes. Before he left St. Gwenllian, Owen said rather earnestly to Lucilla that he thought Valeria looked tired.

"So do I."

"Is she ill?"

"I don't think so."

"I should hate to think of her being ill."

"I don't think she's ill, Owen."

Lucilla evidently accepted his solicitude as a natural thing.

"I've always thought that Val needed a greater outlet for her energies than she gets here. She's very strong, really, and she did splendidly in France when she was working so hard at her canteen. I wish she could go away and work again."

"Really?"

"Don't you think so yourself?"

"Perhaps—if she wished it very much. There are other things besides work, though," said Owen Quentillian.

"Well—" Lucilla's favourite monosyllable held, as usual, a sound of concession.

"Couldn't one do anything for her—take care of her, somehow?"

"I will order a cup of beef tea for her at eleven o'clock," said Lucilla with seriousness, but with amusement lurking in her eyes.

They parted upon a mutual smile of excellent understanding.

Quentillian thought that he liked Lucilla, with her impersonal calm, and her unquestioning acceptances.

He wrote to Valeria from London, letters that he felt to be self-conscious, and received uneloquent replies. He had left St. Gwenllian a fortnight when he finally composed an epistle that left him a little—a very little—less than profoundly dissatisfied with his own powers of composition. He received her reply by return of post.

“ OWEN DEAR,

“ I’ve got your letter. I can’t answer it in the way I should like to, making you understand everything that I mean. But do understand first of all that your thinking of me like that makes me very proud, and I wish I was more worth it all.

“ I’m glad you loved someone else before, and thank you for telling me. The reason I’m glad is because I used to like someone very much myself once, but it wasn’t like yours, it was only my own foolishness, and never came to anything. But I think perhaps it’s prevented my falling really in love, because, dear Owen, I am not in love with you. If I married you, it would be because you are, as you say, very lonely, and because I am very, very fond of you, and also perhaps, a little, because it would make father so happy. But none of those reasons are *the* real, true reason for marrying, are they ?

“ We have known one another so long, and understand one another. Can’t we discuss it honestly together, before settling anything ? Either way, we are always friends, so I will sign myself your loving friend,

“ VALERIA MORCHARD.”

Quentillian read the letter with a strange mingling of disappointment, relief, and mortification.

Nevertheless it was in all sincerity that he wrote to Val of his admiration for her candour.

“ You and I are moderns, my dear. Let us, as you wish,

discuss the future impersonally, but let me first of all say that when—or if—ever you should come to the decision which I want you to come to, then, so far as I am concerned, philosophical discussion will go for nothing. I shall wait for your sign, Val, and if it comes, there shall be no more pen and ink between us, but a meeting for which I long with all my heart."

"Academic," said Owen's inner monitor, relentless as ever.

He posted his letter in spite of it.

It was with relief, and yet with a happiness less defined than he had expected it to be, that Quentillian found himself engaged to Valeria.

He regretted his own absence of ardour, and was all the time aware of a faint, lurking gratification at having so early outlived the illusions of passionate emotion.

He returned to St. Gwenllian.

This time it was Valeria who met him. Something in the simplicity with which she accepted their new relationship touched him profoundly, and rendered of no account his own temperamental subtleties.

It was with a deepening sense of sincerity that Quentillian said to her:

"You have made me very happy, dearest."

"I'm glad, Owen. I'm happy too."

Her hand lay trustfully in his.

"They want to see you so much, at home, Owen. I've told them. They're all so pleased."

It evidently added to Valeria's content that it should be so.

"You know that father has always really looked upon you as another son, ever since the days when you and I got into trouble for playing at Greek sacrificial processions with the guinea-pigs on silver salvers."

They laughed together at the recollection.

The Canon had not been hard upon the classically-minded delinquents.

Quentillian believed himself to have realised fully the adjuncts, necessary and fitting in the eyes of the Mordard family, but to himself distasteful in the extreme, of his engagement to Valeria.

He was prepared for conventional congratulations, for the abhorrent necessity of discussing his personal affairs, for an emotional absence of reticence that would differ as widely from his own impersonal, dissecting-room outspokenness as would the Canon's effusive periods from Quentillian's cultivated terseness of expression.

Nevertheless, he was less well-armoured, or more severely tried, than he had expected to be.

Canon Mordard seemed to shower welcome, blessings, congratulations upon him. He said :

" Dear lad, you and I must have a long talk together at no distant date."

They had many.

It seemed to Quentillian that he saw more of the Canon than of Valeria in the days that ensued.

" Val, when will you marry me ? I'm quite selfish enough to want you to myself," Quentillian said to her with firmness, after a week at St. Gwenllian that seemed to him to have been mainly differentiated from his last visit there by the increased number of one-sided talks with the Canon to which he had been subjected.

Val said tentatively : " The end of January ? "

" Why not before Christmas ? Stear should be quite ready for us by then."

It relieved him with strange intensity to know that he would not, after all, go alone to Stear.

Valeria looked at him, and although her voice when she spoke was serious, a certain mischievous amusement lurked in her eyes.

"Before Christmas, it's Advent," she said.

"Advent?"

"I don't think father would like my wedding to be during Advent at all."

"I see."

"Oh, don't be vexed, Owen. It's only a month's difference, after all."

"It isn't that," began Quentillian candidly, and then shared in her slight, unoffended laughter at his lack of gallantry.

"I only mean, my dear, that I don't like to see you bound by that sort of superstition. Do you *really* think it can make any difference if we're married on one particular date rather than another?"

"I'm thinking entirely of father," gently said Val, thus altogether evading the real point at issue.

Quentillian was again and again made aware of this capacity in Val for the avoidance of any discussion between them on the subject of religion.

It was as though the faint rebellion that he had discerned in her at her own way of life had been extinguished by the mere prospect of its coming to an end. Nor, when he finally forced an issue, did Val appear to possess his own capacities for impartial, essentially impersonal, discussion.

"Can't we leave it alone, Owen? You told me what your views were—and you know what mine are. We've been honest with one another—isn't that all that matters?"

"In a sense, of course it is. You don't think that perhaps it's a pity to know there's one subject we must tacitly avoid—that we can't discuss freely?"

He spoke without emphasis of any kind.

"It is a pity, of course," said Val literally. "But how can we help it? I can hardly listen to you without disloyalty of the worst kind. If you look at it from my point of view for a moment, you do see that, don't you, Owen?"

"Yes, I suppose I do see that," he said heavily.

He felt strangely disappointed and disillusioned.

"Do you wish me to say anything to your father about that?"

Val blushed deeply, but spoke quite resolutely.

"No, I don't. I've thought it over, and I can't see that it concerns anyone but you and me. Lucilla says so too. I asked her, what she thought. It's not as though I were eighteen, and it's not as though I didn't trust you, absolutely, not to interfere with my beliefs, any more than I with your—unbeliefs."

Confronted with her grave trustfulness, no less than with the obvious justice of her words, Quentillian could only agree with her.

His rather arrogant conviction of earlier days, that Val's beliefs must go, gave place to an unescapable certainty that they would not even be modified. Rather would Valeria, enforced by tradition and by the inherited faith that was in her, expect with the course of years to influence her husband's views.

Owen felt strongly the hopelessness of such expectation, and still more strongly the inexpediency, not to say the impossibility, of urging that hopelessness upon Valeria.

It was decided that the wedding should take place in January, and the engagement be made public just before Christmas.

"You do not want to let the world in upon your joy too

soon, young people," the Canon told them with a grave smile.

Val's answering smile acquiesced in the assumption, as indeed the smiles and silences, no less than the spoken words, of his entire family were always apt to acquiesce in any assumption made by Canon Mordard, whether the facts warranted such acquiescence or not.

The days slipped by, very much as they had slipped by before Quentillian and Valeria had become engaged. If Quentillian had expected a greater difference, a more profound element, he was at least not consciously disappointed.

Val was charming and—he would not have to face loneliness at Stear.

Indeed, at one moment it almost appeared as though Valeria would not be alone in accomplishing the destruction of the spirit of solitude at Stear.

Adrian Mordard sought his prospective brother-in-law, and said, with singularly ill-chosen colloquialism:

"Tell me, old thing, have you had any talk with the governor about that living at Stear?"

"Not yet."

"I suppose—ha, ha!—you'll laugh—in fact I shouldn't be surprised if you thought it dashed funny—it makes me smile myself, in a way—you'll *roar* when I tell you what I'm thinking of."

Quentillian felt as melancholy as do the majority of people thus apostrophised, and was aware that his melancholy was reflected on his face in a forbidding expression.

Adrian had turned rather pale.

"You know the old man's always been desperately keen on my going into the Church? Well—I say, you can

laugh as much as you want to, I shan't be offended—I'm not at all sure I shan't do it."

Quentillian felt no inclination whatever to indulge in the prescribed orgy of merriment.

" You coming into the family like this, with a good living going begging, makes it a pretty obvious move in a way, doesn't it?—and then it'd please the old man frightfully—and really there are precious few openings for a man who hasn't been brought up to anything special nowadays."

" Yes. And what is the real reason? "

Adrian laughed uncomfortably.

" Sherlock Holmes! Well, between ourselves, I don't mind telling you that I want to see some prospect of being able to marry, and if I had a definite thing in view, like Stear, I might be able to bring it off."

" You can't be ordained in five minutes."

" I've got to wait anyhow," said Adrian gloomily. " She won't even be engaged yet. I thought I might as well fill in the time at Cambridge or somewhere, if it's going to lead to something. I'm quite willing to wait if I must, and of course I shall never change."

" It's Miss Duffle, I suppose? I can't say I should have thought she'd enjoy the life of a country parson's wife."

" You haven't the least idea of what she's really like."

" Perhaps not," Owen's voice implied the contrary. " What about yourself? Do you really suppose you could stand it? "

" Of course I could, if it meant *her*. My dear fellow, my mind's *absolutely* made up, I may tell you, and has been for—for days. But of course," he added ingenuously, " it does depend a good deal on whether you'll promise me Stear or not at the end of it all."

"What about your father?"

"Oh, he'll jump at it, of course. It's been the one wish of his heart, all along," said Adrian easily.

Quentillian wondered how it was possible that any youth, brought up in the atmosphere of St. Gwenllian, could be so entirely devoid of insight. To his own way of thinking, it was utterly incredible that Canon Morchard, ardent Christian and idealist, should contemplate with any degree of equanimity his son's proposed flippant adoption of a vocation which he regarded as sacred.

Owen committed himself to no promises.

"I should like to talk it over with Val."

"I suppose if you must you must," said Adrian grudgingly. "But don't let her tell anyone else."

Valeria's views were not far removed from Quentillian's own.

It sometimes, indeed, seemed to Owen that the identity of their points of view on every other subject only rendered more evident the deep gulf dividing them on the topic that Valeria had decreed should be a barred one—that of religion.

Spoken, their very difference might have brought them closer together. Unspoken, it seemed to Owen to pervade all their intercourse since their engagement as it had never done before.

(vi)

Valeria had been engaged for some weeks, when she wrote a letter.

"DEAR CAPTAIN CUSCADEN,

"I thought I would like to tell you myself that

I am engaged to be married. It is to Owen Quentillian, whom I have known all my life almost, and we hope to be married in January.

"I hope you will have very good luck in Canada, and that you will sometimes let us know how you get on. We are expecting you on Saturday, to come and say good-bye.

"Yours sincerely,  
"VALERIA MORCHARD."

Val spent a long while over the composition of her brief letter, re-read it a great number of times, and finally tore it up very carefully into small pieces.

"What's the use?" she said.

Captain Cuscaden, however, did not seem to have been dependent upon Valeria for news of Valeria's engagement. He congratulated her formally on the Saturday afternoon when he came to pay his farewell visit to St. Gwenllian.

Olga Duffle was there too, and Miss Admaston.

"No more tennis this year. It's going to rain again," said Flora.

"Here it comes," Mr. Clover pointed out.

"It may clear up later—let's have tea."

After tea the rain was still falling heavily.

"How are all you young folk going to amuse yourselves?" genially enquired the Canon. "Lucilla, can you not organise some of our old *jeux d'esprits*, with pencils and paper?"

There was an inarticulate protest from the Captain, to which no one paid any attention except Valeria, who heard it, and Olga, who replied to it: "I'll help you, Dzorze, if you're very good."

Mr. Clover was zealous in finding paper and pencils.

"I can't resist this," said the Canon boyishly. "I

must give some of my old favourites a turn before going to more serious affairs. Now, what is it to be?"

No one appeared to be very ready with suggestions. Captain Cuscaden was gloomily gazing out of the window, Olga and Adrian were talking in undertones, and Miss Admaston was telling Quentillian how very much she dreaded and disliked any games that required the use of brains.

"Are we all ready?" said Mr. Clover joyously.

"I suppose we're as ready as we ever shall be," said Captain Cuscaden.

Thus encouraged, they began.

Canon Mordard, Lucilla, and Owen Quentillian outmatched the rest of the players with ease. Each seemed to think with promptitude of great men whose names started with A, battles that began with M, or quotations—English—of which the initial letter was W.

They challenged one another's references and verified one another's dates. They capped quotations, and they provided original *boâts-rimés*.

The entertainment gradually resolved itself into one animated trio, with a faithful but halting chorus in the persons of Mr. Clover and Flora, and a rapid and low-toned aside between Adrian and Miss Duffle.

Captain Cuscaden played a listless game of noughts and crosses with Miss Admaston, and Valeria leant back in her chair and ceased to pretend that she was occupied.

She looked at the sapphire-and-diamond ring on her finger and thought about Owen's cleverness. She remembered that Lucilla had said he would be a difficult person to live with. She remembered her own secret desires for a life of work, and her assurances to herself that such ambitions were out of place. She reminded herself that

her father had been, in his own parlance, glad beyond words to welcome Owen Quentillian as a son. And she looked at Owen himself, and saw him intent upon his little slips of paper, and a sudden rush of tenderness came over her. His absorption in the game seemed to make him younger, and in more need of her. She could remember Owen as a flaxen-haired, solemn, rather priggish little boy, and she suddenly felt that perhaps he had not changed a very great deal since those days after all.

Val felt happier, in a subdued and wistful way. She woke to the realisation that the games were ended.

The Canon had risen.

"Look up that derivation, Clover, dear man, and let me have it. I shall be curious. . . . Fare ye well, young people. I recommend Lucilla here as a veritable dictionary of dates, if you wish to continue your amusement."

Nothing could have been more evident, the moment the Canon had left the room, than that no one wished to pursue amusement on the lines indicated.

Even Mr. Clover joined in the general movement that thankfully relinquished paper and pencil, and sent everyone to the piano, flung open by Olga Duffie.

"Do play something," Adrian pleaded.

"Oh, not me. Make your sister play. She plays so much better than I do."

It was indubitably true that Flora played a great deal better than did Olga, yet nobody seemed to want Flora to play the piano, and Olga, even as she protested, slipped on to the music-stool and ran her small fingers over the keys.

"I say, how well you do everything!" Adrian murmured ecstatically above her.

She looked up at him and smiled, showing all her little pointed teeth.

They clustered round her.

"Do you know 'Oh, Kiss Me and I'll Never Tell' that comes in that revue—I forget its name—the new one? It's lovely."

To the perceptions of Valeria M orchard, trained in the eclectic school of the Canon's taste, the musical inspiration in question was not only undeserving of being called lovely, but was vulgar to the point of blatancy, ringing through the St. Gwenllian drawing-room in Olga's little, high, soprano voice.

She was not at all surprised that Owen should look at her through his pince-nez with eyebrows expressively elevated, nor that Mr. Clover, presumably in a futile endeavour to spare the Canon's ears, should unobtrusively go and shut the door.

Val looked at Lucilla.

There was something not at all unlike amusement on Miss M orchard's face, but Val did not think that it was caused by the humour of "Oh, Kiss Me and I'll Never Tell." Rather it might have been born of a gentle irony, embracing alike the puzzled distaste of Flora, the obvious terror of the curate lest he should be supposed to be enjoying the entertainment, the absorption with which Captain Cuscarden, Adrian, and even Miss Admaston stood and listened, the supercilious detachment of Owen Quentillian, the complacent unconsciousness of the small, pert singer at the piano.

No doubt Lucilla could have detected, had she cared to do so, the unspecified emotions that Val suspected of being written upon her own unsmiling face.

She felt suddenly impatient.

"We're all intolerable. Lucilla is superior, and Flossie takes this rubbish *au grand sérieux*, like a crime, and Owen

is thinking how deplorable it is that idiotic words should be set to inferior music, and thrust upon the British public for its education. . . I can hear exactly what he'll say about it afterwards."

It struck her that the anticipation scarcely boded well for a life that was in future to be spent in Quentillian's company.

" My dusky gal is black as coal,  
But she's just the whitest, brightest soul."

caroled Olga.

" I love the darky songs, don't you ? "

" Rather."

" Why does the English youth of to-day seek artistic inspiration from the uncivilised population of Central Africa, I wonder ? " said Owen Quentillian unpleasantly. He addressed himself to Lucilla, but his very distinct utterance was perfectly audible to everybody else.

Captain Cuscaden laughed, and Olga looked round with perfect good humour. It was Adrian who glared at Quentillian, and Mr. Clover who observed reproachfully :

" I'm sure those old plantation songs are charming, as Miss Olga renders them."

" You shouldn't be so superior, Owen," said Lucilla tranquilly.

It was what Val had been thinking, but she had found herself quite unable to say it, from the very intensity of her feeling.

Lucilla placed an old album on the music-stand, and they all began to sing together " Comin' through the Rye."

The music affected Valeria almost intolerably.

All the Morchards had good voices, and both Flora and Lucilla sang well. Their true, deep voices gradually dominated Olga's high pipe, and the four men sank to

a mere murmur of accompaniment. Miss Admaston had never done more than crane over everybody's shoulder in turn in an endeavour to see the page at close quarters, and murmur the last words of a verse in an undertone when everyone else was singing the first line of the refrain. She was now altogether silent.

"Sing the Russian songs, Flora," said Quentillian.

Valeria pressed her hands closer together and leant against the wall.

It was growing dark.

The air of the Russian song that Flora chose was wild and sweet.

" You are my darling, you are my soul,  
Light of my life, my sun, my goal. . . .  
You are my being, my delight :  
Star of my darkest night."

Direct, primitive worship of one man for one woman : Flora's voice held all the passion that was not in her, save at her music.

The ache at Val's heart seemed to her physical in its intensity.

She knew what she wanted, now, and she knew that Owen Quentillian would not give it her.

To her own horror, a rush of tears blinded her.

" But all is well, for thou art with me ;  
The world is full of only thee,"

sang Flora.

" What is the matter ? " said the low, troubled voice of Cuscaden beside her.

Val started violently.

" Val, you *must* tell me. What is it ? . . . "

They looked at each other.

It suddenly became the thing that mattered most in the world that Val M orchard and George Cuscaden should speak alone to one another.

Regardless of the rain pouring outside, Valeria gently opened the French window behind her.

"Come outside. I must speak to you," she said urgently. She had no idea what she was going to say.

Outside, in the rapidly gathering darkness, the rain fell in torrents and splashed up from the ground against the stone step of the low verandah that ran round the house.

Cuscaden stepped out of the warm room and closed the window again behind him. It was as though he had shut them out of the world of music and companionship, into some colder, more virile atmosphere.

"But all is well, for thou art with me;  
The world is full of only thee."

Flora's song reached them as faintly as possible, and neither heeded it.

They faced one another, and Val found that she was shivering from head to foot.

"Why do I never get a chance of speaking to you, nowadays?" said Captain Cuscaden violently.

"You could have," said Valeria, and her voice broke. His arms went round her.

"Val, Val, I love you so."

It was as though Quentillian had never existed.

"And you're going to Canada," she wailed.

"You're coming with me."

"I must," Val said, and surrendered herself to his kisses.

"My daughter, how wet you are!" exclaimed the Canon.

His daughter, hastening to her own room, paused under the light of a lamp, and inadvertently thereby gave the Canon an opportunity of verifying his statement.

Val, beneath his astonished gaze, became acutely aware that her rain-wet hair was disordered, her face flaming, and showing all the marks of recent and violent weeping.

"What is all this?" the Canon enquired rather sternly.

Valeria felt utterly incapable of replying.

"Answer me, Valeria."

"Captain Cuscaden is looking for you," said Valeria almost inaudibly.

"Captain Cuscaden?"

"Yes."

They gazed speechlessly at one another.

A weight had descended upon the Canon's brow and the lines round his mouth were set sternly.

"Valeria, has he insulted you?"

The immediate conviction overwhelmed her that the Canon's opinion of her recent interview with Captain Cuscaden would certainly demand an emphatically affirmative reply to the enquiry. She felt a purely hysterical desire to burst out laughing at the thought.

"How is Captain Cuscaden concerned with you? If it is as I think, Valeria, you did well to refer him to me."

"But it isn't. He—I—we are both to blame, father. I'm going to break off my engagement to Owen. I love George."

The words were said, and although Valeria broke into a flood of tears, it was with a sense of relief. Telling Owen that she did not intend to marry him after all, was, she honestly felt, nothing to telling the Canon so.

She sank on to the stairs and hid her face in her hands,

afraid to face her father's realisation of the implication that her words contained.

It did not tarry.

"Do you want me to understand that you are under a solemn engagement to marry Owen Quentillian, and that you have at the same time been allowing—encouraging—the clandestine attentions of this—this *fellow*? You, my daughter, behaving like a wanton? I won't believe it—I can't believe it." The Canon's voice rose violently. "Valeria, for God's sake tell me I'm mistaken—don't crouch there like a guilty creature—tell me I'm wrong, tell me you're the pure, honest maiden I've tried to make you, and not—not—a creature without honour, without decency."

The rising note of anguish broke on a strangled sob.

Below, a door was shut sharply.

"Get up," said the Canon with violence.

Valeria rose, and he pulled her to her feet and gazed searchingly into her face.

"And this is my child!" said the Canon, and in his turn dropped his face into his hands, groaning.

"I couldn't help it"; she spoke between her sobs, like a child. "Owen knew I wasn't in love with him . . . only I never realised, I didn't know George cared too—it was always him. . . ."

"Stop!" thundered the Canon. "Are you without shame, Valeria? Is that fellow waiting for me downstairs, or has he crawled away, as I should expect from one who has so repaid my hospitality?"

The words gave Valeria a needed impetus.

"He is ready to meet you, father—he went to find you. And I love him—I suppose I've been very dishonourable, but I—I believe Owen will understand."

She broke into tears again, and left him.

Overwhelmed with the sense of her own dishonour, regarding the Canon's wrath as might have a child, in the light of the greatest calamity that life could present, she turned with absolute relief to the thought of Owen's dispassionate judgments, his studiously impersonal attitude towards life. Owen would understand.

There came a knock at her door.

"Val, may I come in?"

"What is it?" said Valeria unwillingly.

Lucilla entered the room, unperturbed, fully accepting the disordered aspect of its occupant.

"I'm afraid, Val, that the drawing-room door was open, and it was impossible to help hearing father. I thought you'd rather know, in case you wanted to speak to Owen."

"Owen knows?" almost shrieked Valeria.

"I suppose he does. He must have drawn his own conclusions."

"I couldn't help it," said Val again. "I never meant anything like that to happen. It's George Cusoden, Lucilla. It was always him, indeed it was, only I didn't know it, and it all seemed to happen in a minute—it was stronger than either of us."

"I daresay you did quite right. Why don't you wash, Val?"

"Oh, Lucilla, how like you!"

Valeria laughed shakily, but she followed her sister's advice.

Lucilla methodically produced Val's brush and comb and dry clothing.

"Maud Admaston and Miss Duffle have gone, and Adrian went with them. Mr. Clover has gone too, so it was only Owen and Flossie and I that heard."

"What did he say?"

"He didn't say anything. Shall I fasten you up, Val?"

"Lucilla—what am I to do?"

"Tell Owen you can't marry him, and tell George you will marry him."

"I wish it was as simple as that! You always take things so literally."

"Well," said Lucilla unmoved, "I don't see any other way of taking this. You can't be engaged to two people at once. You know—Owen will understand."

"That's what I feel," said Val, to her own surprise. "But father—father will never, never understand."

"Probably not. But after all, it's you, and Owen, and George, isn't it, that are concerned? I shouldn't let there be scenes and upsets about it, Val, if I were you—really I shouldn't. Why don't you just see Owen to-night, and tell him about it, and then you and he and George could all talk it over quietly to-morrow morning?"

Val was conscious of profound astonishment and also of extreme relief.

"Do you think one could? But father——"

"You needn't go downstairs again. I quite understand that you don't want to see father again to-night. Shall I tell Owen to come up here?"

"Here? How could he, in my bedroom?"

"Goodness me, child, you may just as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, surely! But if you think it's so dreadful, I suppose you can come out on to the landing and speak to him."

Impossible to disconcert Lucilla!

Val assented to the surprising propositions so matter-of-factly delivered.

"Yes, tell Owen to come up. I'd better get it over. But, Lucilla—George—"

"Do you want me to see him, or give him a message?"

"I want to know what father says to him," Val said faintly.

"Very well. I'll ask father when George has gone."

"And oh, Lucilla! I know you can't prevent it, really, but if only you could make father not come up to me to-night! I can't bear any more—indeed I can't."

"Well," said Lucilla, "you'd better lock the door then." She took the key from the lock, put it on the inside of the door, and tried it in a practical manner. "That's all right. You can lock it on the inside as soon as Owen has gone."

She went downstairs, but turned and came up again the next moment.

"I'll have dinner sent up to you, shall I?"

"I don't want any."

"I should think you'd better have something, Val. I'll send up soup and chicken. The pudding is only ginger, and you know how badly she makes ginger pudding."

Lucilla departed in earnest upon this prosaic pronouncement.

She was succeeded by Owen Quentillian, and Val went out upon the landing to meet him.

"Will you forgive me, Owen? I can't marry you."

"What has happened?"

"I thought you knew," she said piteously.

"I suppose I do. Is it Cuscaden?"

"Yes."

"Then why," Owen demanded in reasonable accents, "couldn't he have proposed to you himself without waiting for you to be engaged to me?"

"He thought he couldn't ask me to go to Canada—and he's badly off—and then, when you came, he—he thought it was you I cared about."

"I see," said Quentillian dryly.

"I don't think I knew, exactly, that I still cared for him, and I was sure he hadn't meant anything, and it—it was really all over—only then—Flora's music, somehow—and he asked me what it was—and I cried. Owen, won't you forgive me? Surely it's better than if I'd tried to go on with it?"

"Of course it is."

They looked at one another rather helplessly.

"Val, if I can do anything to help you, of course I will. What are you going to do?"

"I can't think," said Valeria faintly.

"When does Cuscaden sail?"

"Next week."

"That's bad luck," said Owen impartially. "Look here, my dear, you must be tired out. Won't you go and sleep now, and in the morning we could see what's to be done?"

"Oh, how good you are!"

He frowned slightly.

"Surely the day of heroics is over. I haven't the slightest desire to exchange pistol-shots with Captain Cuscaden, I assure you. We are three reasonable human beings, and we find ourselves in a difficulty from which only clear thinking and absolute plain speaking can extricate us. You may believe me when I tell you that I am perfectly prepared to discuss the case upon its own merits."

Valeria could believe him without difficulty. Even in the midst of her distress, she could not altogether stifle a slight suspicion that Owen was appreciating the

opportunity afforded him for being thoroughly modern and rational.

“Have you seen father?”

“Not yet.”

Quentillian's tone betrayed no great eagerness for the prospective interview,

“He is very, very angry with me, and I know he has every right to be. But indeed, Owen, I was coming straight to you, only I met him first, and it somehow came out. George was going to tell him.”

“Your father has never liked Captain Cusoden,” said Quentillian meditatively. “I am afraid he will make things very difficult.”

“I deserve it.”

“Don't be absurd,” said Quentillian with severity. “This is that foolish idea of atonement and repentance—and all the other cheap salves to the humiliation of having made a mistake. Don't you see that it's all waste of time and energy, Val? You ought to be thinking of what you're going to do next, and how you can do it with least wear and tear for us all. Life isn't a series of sins and punishments or virtues and rewards, as it is in one's nursery story-books. There are actions and their consequences—that's all.”

She looked up at him, bewildered, and yet slightly relieved at perceiving that he still possessed the power of sententiousness.

“Only say you forgive me, Owen.”

“If you wish it, my dear, of course. Please don't cry any more.”

Valeria, however, crying more than ever, drew the sapphire-and-diamond ring from her finger and mutely held it out to him.

Owen gazed at it for a moment through his *pince-nez*. Then he put it gently back into her hand again, and closed her fingers round it with his own.

“Please, Val.”

Still holding her hand, he bent forward and very softly kissed her wet cheek.

“If we’re not engaged any more, we’ve got to go back to what we were before—brother and sister, Val. Good-night—don’t cry any more.”

The smile with which he left her was in his eyes as well as on his lips, and held nothing so much as very gentle amusement and an affectionate concern.

(vii)

The amusement was no longer to be seen in the eyes of Quentillian, and the concern had no affinity with affectionateness when he reached the door of the Canon’s study.

He felt himself to be eleven years old once more, and in complete uncertainty as to the manner in which he might be received, after the discovery of some unwonted misdemeanour.

The thunderous voice that bade him “Come in” did nothing to dispel the unpleasing illusion.

The Canon was sitting at the writing-table, under the carved crucifix that hung against the green velvet plaque. A blotting-pad, deeply scored with heavy black lines, lay beneath his hand, and a broken lead pencil testified to the energy with which that hand had sought an outlet for the feelings that presumably agitated its owner.

The Canon swung round in his chair as the door closed behind Quentillian.

"Owen, Owen!" His voice broke. "My boy, how can I face you?"

The Canon answered his own question by rising impetuously and leaning heavily upon Quentillian's shoulder, one hand across his eyes.

"My dear, dear fellow!"

His voice, charged with emotion, broke horribly over each fresh ejaculation.

"My son—Owen—you've been nothing less to me—and now—treated like this—one of mine own household—what can I say, what can I say?"

Quentillian longed heartily to implore the Canon to say nothing at all.

"Won't you sit down, sir? I thought I'd better come and talk to you, if I may."

"Anything, anything, dear lad. Have you seen my unhappy child?"

"Valeria and I have agreed that we are no longer engaged," said Owen carefully. "I don't consider that I have been unfairly treated. She discovered, rather before the eleventh hour, that she and Captain Cuscaden were in love with one another, and it would have been quite as unjust to me as to herself if she had not acted upon the discovery."

Canon Mochard gazed anxiously at the victim of this neatly-analysed situation.

"For Heaven's sake, Owen, don't let yourself become bitter. It is so easy—so fatally easy, when one is suffering. Take a stronger grip of your faith than ever before, dear lad—remember that '*all* things work together for good.' One learns to dwell upon those words, and the meaning deepens into something so unspeakably precious. . . ."

To Owen's relief the Canon sank back into his chair again.

"I can offer you no atonement," he said presently, with a deep weariness in his voice. "I am still unutterably bewildered. How I have failed, how I have failed, with my motherless girl! And I thought I knew my child—my merry Valeria, as I have called her from her babyhood—I thought I knew her through and through! *She* to be dishonourable, *she* to be heartless, *she* to attach herself to a godless, brainless, mannerless fellow—and when a man like yourself had received her troth! Owen, it is as though mine own right hand had turned against me."

The Canon held out a trembling right hand and gazed upon it.

"Where is Captain Cuscaden now, sir?" enquired Quentillian, almost expecting to hear that the object of his solicitude had been bound and cast into outer darkness.

"Where!" Canon Mordard struck the table with his clenched fist until the blotting-paper and the broken pencil bounded again. "Where! I have dismissed him, Owen. Does he think that I shall give my daughter to one who comes like a thief in the night? There is such a thing as righteous anger, and such an anger was mine then."

It seemed to be his still, Owen reflected, and boded ill for his own wish to discuss the situation impartially.

"Valeria is very unhappy, sir."

The Canon groaned.

"I can't trust myself to see her, to speak to her. God knows that my place is with my unhappy child, but my shameful lack of self-control makes me tremble. I have been angry—I am angry still."

He looked piteously at Owen.

" I have thought to get the better of my devil with prayer and fasting, but the old Adam is strong—terribly strong. When I saw my child—my little Valeria—her eyes wild, her person disordered, dashing upstairs, as might a shamed creature, to hide itself—when I realised the depths of her dishonour—Owen, it was in me to have struck her. I could have raised my hand against my own child ! "

His head sank upon his breast.

Quentillian waited before making a further, strangely inadequate, contribution to the conversation.

" Do you think, sir, perhaps you may be taking this too seriously ? "

Canon Mordard stared at him. Then he smiled grimly.

" Generous—very generous, Owen. But I am to be deceived by no such feint. I, who have had the care of souls these thirty years ! Do you think that, whatever front you may present to the world, my eyes—*mine*—are to be blinded ? Do you think that *I* do not know that the iron has entered into your soul ? "

The Canon's eyes were so extraordinarily piercing as they gazed into Quentillian's, that the object of his penetration sought in himself almost hopefully for some of the searing emotions attributed to him.

He discovered none.

Wounded in his vanity, annoyed, disappointed even—but nothing more.

Owen, quite aware of futility, inwardly formed phrases of complete truthfulness, only to reject them.

" I assure you that I am not in the least unhappy at having been jilted by your daughter . . . it leaves me quite cold. . . . I don't think I ever really wanted to marry Val very much . . . we were much better friends before we tried to become engaged. . . . "

Or, with a yet more devastating candour :

“ I’ve been certain for days that I made a complete fool of myself by ever proposing marriage to Valeria. . . . ”

This surprisingly agile form of mental gymnastics was tempestuously interrupted by the Canon.

“ For God’s sake, Owen, break down ! ” he groaned. “ My boy, my boy, you’re safe with me. Forget that I’m Valeria’s father—think of me only as one who has known suffering—aye, and sin too. Make a safety-valve of me—let yourself go. But I can bear this sham cynicism of yours no longer. It’s wrong, Owen, it’s wrong. True fortitude faces what lies before it, finds its Gethsemane, and rises, purged of bitterness. Break down—weep, nay, curse if you will, only cast open the floodgates. Let loose whatever devils possess your soul—you, the victim of treachery—let them loose, I say, and we will conquer them together.”

For an instant, all that Quentillian could do hardly sufficed to prevent his letting loose a violent fit of laughter.

He drove his teeth into his lower lip. It was his increasing perception of the Canon’s overwhelming misery that steadied him.

“ Val has hurt me less than you think, sir,” he said gently at last. “ I have sometimes thought that she and I had made a mistake.”

The Canon gazed at him with a pathetic unbelief.

“ My unhappy child does not know what she has lost.”

“ I hope she is going to be happy in her own way,” said Quentillian.

The Canon’s brow instantly became thunderous again.

“ Not one word, Owen—not one word on those lines,” he commanded sternly. “ I appreciate your generosity deeply, but there is such a thing as carrying generosity too far.”

"I can see small generosity in relinquishing to someone else what is no longer mine."

The Canon swept on, unheeding.

"My faith in my child has received a rude shock. Valeria is unfit for wifehood and motherhood. How can I let her undertake responsibility when she has proved herself unworthy up to the hilt? No, Owen, let it rest there. *I* will deal with Valeria, and may God help us both!"

Quentillian felt inclined to echo the petition wholeheartedly.

He could not doubt that the Canon's misery was utterly unfeigned. So, also, was his wrath.

The incongruous sound of the dinner-gong vibrated violently through the room.

The Canon did not stir.

His voice, when next he spoke, was almost a groan.

"I cannot see Valeria to-night. God forgive me, I am not master of myself. Your calm shames me, Owen. But it is not natural, not natural. You will, and must, suffer for it later on. Tell me, dear fellow—that I should have to say it!—do you wish to leave us—do you wish to go?"

Owen wished for nothing so much as an immediate adjournment to the dining-room, but he felt that it would indeed be impossible to say so.

"You would not wish me to send Valeria from home, I know. Nor do I know where I could send her."

"Let her marry Cuscaden," said Quentillian boldly.

"Never, Owen! Give my child—my weak, untrustworthy child, to a man who could behave as Cuscaden has behaved? Believe me, I appreciate the generosity that prompts you, but you know not what you ask—you know not what you ask."

Quentillian, entirely unaccustomed to any such accusation, was silently annoyed.

He was also hungry.

"I have sometimes thought," said the Canon with a trembling voice, "that my tendency has been to idolise my children. I lost their mother so early. You know how it was with me, Owen. Lucilla was my eldest born, my right hand. I have come to depend upon Lucilla, paradoxical though it may sound from a father towards his child. David, my eldest son . . ." The Canon paused a long while, and then murmured softly: "'Whilst he was yet a great way off'—David is in a far country, but he will return to us yet, and though his Morning Prayer be our Evensong, who shall say that there is separation between us? And I have kept my other children by my side, Owen. Little Flora has never yet tried her wings away from home. She is more like her mother than any of them—she and the dear Adrian."

A smile like an illumination came into the Canon's eyes as he spoke Adrian's name. "The light of mine eyes that dear lad has always been. My Benjamin! There are no words for what I went through whilst Adrian was fighting, Owen. One could only remember in Whose keeping he was, and that all *must* be well, in reality. But all one's faith was needed—it must be so, with poor human nature. The soul goes through dark waters, Owen, as you are finding now."

The protest which Owen almost automatically registered within himself at this interpolated reference to the despair which he could not feel, was necessarily a silent one.

"Valeria has been the brightest, the most light-hearted, of all my children. She is naturally gifted with high spirits, and she and I have made innocent fun together, have

shared the humorous view of life, a thousand times. Have I allowed that gaiety of hers to turn to flippancy—that mirthful spirit to cloak a lack of principle? I ask myself again and again wherein I have erred—for I cannot hold myself blameless, Owen. I have thought over my motherless children, I have prayed, and yet it has come to this—it has come to this!"

The Canon's head dropped back into his hands once more, and Quentillian felt as though this despairing round of anger, self-blame, self-pity, and genuine misery might go on for ever.

He glanced at the clock. The dinner-gong having failed of its appeal, it appeared as though nothing need ever interrupt them again.

"I will give him five minutes more, and then I shall stand up," Quentillian decided.

The Canon lifted a haggard face.

"Perhaps I had set my heart overmuch upon your marriage with my child, Owen. It may be so—it may be so. I may have forgotten that we poor mortals cannot, after all, see very far—that all plannings and schemings are very vain, seen by the light of Immortal Wisdom. If so, I am receiving my punishment now."

The Canon groaned again.

"I am at a loss how to act. I can decide nothing. I must see Valeria, but how can I do so until I can command myself?"

Even as he asked the question, the veins stood out upon the Canon's forehead, his nostrils quivered, and his face became suffused.

"Three minutes more," Quentillian reflected.

"Owen, one thing I must ask. Has she asked your pardon?"

"Yes, but indeed I don't think——"

"No, Owen, no." The Canon raised his hand in instant protest. "Each generous plea from you stabs me afresh. I ask myself if my unhappy child even knows what she has lost. I thought I knew Valeria through and through—that nothing in her nature was hidden from me, from her father. I have been strangely mistaken indeed."

"Another half minute gone."

"Am I harsh with her, am I harsh to my motherless girl? God knows that I was angry when I met her this evening, distraught-looking, crouching before me like a shamed and terrified creature. I cannot even now fully understand what has occurred, but her own admission was that, engaged to you, she believed herself to love another man—that she had allowed him to make love to her."

Owen stood up resolutely.

"Aye, Owen, I do not wonder at it if you seek the relief of movement. It is more natural so. I, too, in my day, have paced this room."

Quentillian, however, had no desire to pace the room except for the very few steps that would put him outside it.

He debated in vain within himself the most tactful method of making this clear to Canon Mordard.

"I suppose I have been blind. This blow has come upon me with fearful suddenness—I suspected nothing—nothing. How could I——"

The door opened.

Quentillian looked round thankfully at Lucilla. She did not go up to her father, but spoke quietly from the door.

"Father, don't you think Owen should come to dinner?"

A quick frown drew the Canon's always formidable brows together.

"Since when do my children interrupt me in my own room, at my work, Lucilla?" he enquired.

Her face did not change, but she looked at Quentillian.

"Thank you," he said quickly. "I will come."

The Canon rose. His hand went once more to the resting-place now rapidly becoming habitual to it—Quentillian's shoulder.

"Do not let my foolish child impose her trivial urgencies upon you."

The Canon's other hand went out towards his daughter.

"Did I speak over-sharply, my daughter? Perhaps Mary was nearer my mood than Martha, just now—Martha, careful and troubled over many things. Go then, children. Lucilla, you will come to me later. Until then, I do not wish to be disturbed again."

With a heavy sigh, the Canon turned again to his writing-table.

Owen and Lucilla went out.

"He is terribly upset. Could he not be persuaded to come to dinner?"

"No, I knew he wouldn't want that. But I shall take in a tray when I go to him later. Sometimes, if he's talking, he eats without thinking about it. I was counting on that—and besides, he would have disliked my suggesting that he should come in to dinner as usual."

Lucilla's voice and her face alike were entirely guiltless of irony.

Quentillian followed her into the dining-room.

"The others have finished," Lucilla said. "Would you rather I stayed, or that I went?"

"Stay, please."

She sat down opposite to him at once.

"I wish your father were less angry with poor Val,

although perhaps it is not my place to say so. But in his —his generous sympathy for me, I am afraid he has rather lost sight of what she must have been suffering."

"I don't think suffering, in my father's eyes, would ever condone what he considers wrong-doing."

The comment seemed to Owen to be rather an illuminating one.

"I suppose not. It may surprise you to hear that I do not, personally, consider that Canon M orchard is entitled either to condemn or condone whatever Valeria may have done."

"I quite agree with you."

Quentillian was less gratified than astonished at the assertion.

"Val herself would hardly agree to that."

"No."

"Well, but don't you see, Lucilla, how difficult that's going to make things? To my mind, the only natural proceeding is for Valeria and George Cuscaden to marry and go to Canada."

Quentillian paused almost without meaning to, on a pronouncement that would certainly have met with drastic and emphatic interruption from Canon M orchard.

Lucilla, however, received it unmoved.

"Don't you think so?" said Quentillian, slightly disappointed.

"Yes."

"But will Valeria do it? Won't her strange ideas of filial duty interfere? I am absolutely convinced that one of the principal reasons for her ever becoming engaged to me was her wish to please her father."

"I don't think it was altogether that, Owen. But you did ask her to marry you at a time when she was just

beginning to realise that the sort of life she led before the war wasn't going to be enough for her."

"Need it have taken a European war to make her see that?"

The smile that Lucilla turned upon his petulance was disarming.

"Don't be so cross, Owen."

She might have been talking to a little boy.

"I think," said Quentillian with dignity, "that perhaps you forget it was only a few hours ago that I learnt how completely cheated and—and fooled I have been."

He could not avoid a recollection that the Canon would not have needed such a reminder.

"Indeed, I don't forget at all," said Lucilla earnestly.

"It must be very vexing for you; but—Owen, do forgive me for saying that I can't really feel as if you minded dreadfully. You're much too understanding, really, not to know that poor Val didn't wilfully cheat you, any more than she cheated herself. And I think you too, perhaps, in another way, were beginning to feel that you'd made a mistake in promising to marry one another."

Lucilla, Quentillian realised half ruefully and half with amusement, had beaten him at his own game. Her unvarnished appraisement of the situation brought to it no more, and no less, than the facts warranted.

His answering gaze was as straight as her own.

"You're right," he said abruptly.

She held out her hand with a laden plate in it.

"Pudding?" she enquired prosaically.

"Thanks."

He made an excellent dinner.

"But what will happen to us now, Lucilla?"

"Well, George Cuscaden will be here again, and that'll make Val feel better. And you'll help, won't you?"

"Certainly."

And on the strange assurance they separated.

It was much later that Owen, from his own room, heard the door of the study immediately below him open ~~once~~ more, and then shut.

Barely audible, but still unmistakable, he heard a steady stream of sound, rising and falling, easily to be identified as the Canon's voice.

"Good God, what more *can* he have to say about it?" reflected Quentillian. He was destined to ask himself the question again, for the sounds, punctuated by the briefest of pauses, doubtless consecrated to the delivery of laconic replies from Lucilla, continued far into the small hours of the morning.

Finally, after Quentillian had fallen asleep, he was roused by a gentle, reiterated knocking at the door.

Only too well aware whose hand was responsible for those considerably modified taps, he rose and went to open the door, omitting the usual invitation to enter.

As he expected, the Canon, unutterably pale and weary-looking, stood without.

"Dear fellow, I knew that I should find you awake. Owen, I could not but come to tell you that all is well with me now. I have forgiven, even as I myself hope—and need—to be forgiven. I will see Valeria to-morrow, and tell her that she has my full and free pardon. Together we will consider what is the best thing that we can make of this most unhappy business."

"And Cusoden, sir?"

Quentillian intended to suggest the inclusion of Captain Cusoden in the proposed conference, which might reasonably be supposed to concern him closely, but the Canon misunderstood the elliptical reference.

"Aye, Owen, I have no bitterness left in my heart, even for him. 'Unto seventy times seven.' Those words have been ringing in my ears until I could almost bring myself to believe that I heard them uttered aloud. I need not ask if all is well with you, dear boy? Your self-command and generosity have shamed me all along."

The absolute sincerity of the utterance caused Quentillian, with considerably more reason than the Canon, to feel ashamed in his turn.

"I am very far from being what you think me, sir," he said earnestly, and with complete truth. "I am afraid you are very tired."

The Canon, indeed, looked utterly exhausted.

"If so, it is in my Master's service," said Canon Mordard gently. "And you remember, Owen—'there remaineth a rest.' May it be mine, and yours too—all in His own good time! Good-night to you, my dear."

For the first time since Owen's childish days, the Canon placed his hand upon his head and murmured a word of blessing.

Then, with a smile as wistful as it was tender, he turned and went away upstairs.

( VIII )

The following day was one of singular discomfort and of private interviews that were held to be of the greatest necessity, in spite of the fact that the participants always emerged from them in worse plight than they went in.

The Canon saw Valeria in his study; she came out crying.

Valeria sought Flora, and both wept.

Quentillian deliberately demanded an interview from

Captain Cuscaden, but was baffled in his design of a rational discussion of the three-cornered situation by Cuscaden's honest bewilderment at the mere suggestion of disinterested counsel.

It seemed, indeed, that Captain Cuscaden would have understood Owen better, and certainly have thought more highly of him, had the traditional horsewhip, abhorred of all Owen's most deeply-rooted prejudices, held a place in their conversation, at least as threat, if not as actual fact.

Failing the horsewhip, Cuscaden was inclined to follow in the wake of the Canon and attribute to Valeria's discarded *fiancé* a spirit of generous heroism that was even less to Quentillian's liking.

"Captain Cuscaden takes primitive views," Quentillian observed to Lucilla, whom alone he suspected of summing up the whole situation very much at its true value.

"Yes, that will suit Val very well."

"You think she takes primitive views too?"

"Yes, don't you?"

Owen realised that, although he had never thought Valeria subtle, he had at least supposed her to be capable of appreciating his own subtlety. But subtleties had not, apparently, really weighed with Val at all.

The sight of her tear-mottled face annoyed Owen's æsthetic sense so much, and he felt so sincerely ashamed of his annoyance, that it constrained him to absent himself from the house all the afternoon. He would gladly have left St. Gwenllian altogether, and felt sure that the Canon expected nothing less of him, but Flora brought him a piteous message from Val to beg that he would remain until "something was settled."

In the forlorn hope that this had been achieved, Quentillian returned.

An eager grasp met him almost upon the threshold.

"Owen, dear lad! Where have you been? I have been uneasy—most uneasy—at your prolonged absence."

"I'm very sorry, sir."

"Nay, so long as all is well with you! I should have had more faith."

The Canon smiled gravely, and relief was latent in the smile. Quentillian suddenly realised that Canon Mordard had not improbably known the subconscious fear of his guest and *protégé* having sought some drastic means of ending an existence in the course of which he had been played so ill a turn.

His sense of his own inadequacy increased every moment.

"May I know how things stand?" he enquired abruptly.

"May you? Who has a better right than yourself, dear Owen? Come you out with me, and let us have a few words together."

Owen followed his host.

"It has been a trying day—a sad and trying one. But I need not tell you that—you, whose grief is so much greater than mine own, even. Though you, at least, Owen, have nothing to reproach yourself with, whereas I am responsible for the weakness in my poor child which has led to this unhappy state of affairs. But at least she is fully sensible of error—she knows what she has done."

It would be strange indeed if she did not, Owen reflected, in the universal *boulversement* that had characterised Valeria's surroundings ever since her sudden departure from the conventions.

"To my surprise, Lucilla, upon whose judgment I place a certain reliance, although it may sound somewhat odd to hear of a father seeking counsel of his child—Lucilla advocates my sanctioning her sister's marriage. My first

instinct was, of course, to cut her short at the mention of anything so premature—so—so lacking in all taste or feeling. But—I hardly know—”

“ There is nothing against Captain Cuscaden, is there ? ”

Quentillian made the observation in the simple hope of expediting the Canon’s decision, but he immediately perceived that it laid him open once more to the imputation of high-minded generosity.

“ I mean to say, he can afford to marry ? ” he amended hastily.

“ He has satisfied me upon that score,” Canon Mordard admitted. “ I have never desired wealth for my dear ones, nor have they been brought up to it. Valeria is not unfitted to become the wife of a poor man. Nay, had she but acted an honourable and high-minded part throughout, I should gladly send her forth into the New World. Valeria has something of the pioneer spirit, I have always felt.”

He sighed heavily.

“ In short, Owen, if, as Lucilla tells me, you share her own view, then I shall not withhold my consent to this marriage. The haste is strange and unseemly, but Captain Cuscaden cannot postpone his departure, in view of the position awaiting him, and my unhappy child, left here, would be in a difficult and awkward situation, nor have I any security, alas, that she has sufficient discretion to face such a situation.”

“ It might be difficult for her,” Quentillian admitted. “ Lucilla is looking for us, I think, sir.”

Lucilla was indeed advancing towards them.

The Canon frowned slightly.

“ Am I wanted, my child ? ”

“ It was Owen that I wanted, father.”

“ My dear, Owen is engaged with me.”

"I know." Lucilla seemed slightly perplexed, but quite unruffled. "I know, but the post is just going, and I thought Owen ought to see this before I send it to the papers."

She handed him a sheet of notepaper, upon which he read a brief and conventionally-worded announcement to the effect that the marriage arranged between himself and Valeria M orchard would not take place.

He passed it to the Canon, who groaned.

"Must this be?" he enquired, with some superfluity.

The superfluity seemed to strike himself, for he added almost at once:

"'If 'twere done, 'twere well 'twere done quickly,' no doubt."

"There is the other announcement to be thought of," said Lucilla with merciless common-sense. "If Val is married at the end of this week, we shall have to put that in the papers."

The Canon gave Owen a quick, anxious glance.

"Come into the house, my daughter," he said to Lucilla. "We can speak of such matters there."

Owen understood that Canon M orchard was thinking of him.

On a sudden impulse he went to seek Valeria.

"Look here, my dear, I'd do anything to help you, but do you really want me to stay on here any longer? It's more than I can stand."

"Oh, Owen! I thought you'd forgiven me—I thought you didn't mind, so very much, after all," she cried in dismay.

"I don't mind in the least," Quentillian told her desperately. "But it's a false position altogether, and I want to be out of it."

"Of course you do; it was very selfish of me to want to keep you. Only somehow father is less—dreadful—when you're there, Owen. But he's forgiven me"—her tears were falling fast—"and I'm going out with George when he sails, at the beginning of next week. We shall be married very, very quietly on Saturday."

"I'm very glad to hear it. Indeed I am, Val. I'm sure he's a good fellow, and I hope he'll make you very happy."

She was crying too much to speak, as he went away from her.

And Quentillian, definitely, could tell himself that he had no regrets in relinquishing Valeria.

Her warm emotionalism had not been without its appeal, but he had no liking for tears at a crisis, nor indeed for a crisis at all. His mind reverted to Lucilla's matter-of-fact fashion of dealing with the crucial instances of life at St. Gwenllian, and, theoretically, he met her attitude with applause. But he also remembered that he had not found her sympathetic upon the preceding evening.

Impartially, he acknowledged with a rueful smile his own exactingness.

He must go, and decided that it should be to London. As for Stear, he would face it later. The thought of Stear, and the loneliness there, brought the reallest sense of loss to him that he had yet experienced over the defection of Valeria.

He had thought to hear her laughter there, to see the apricot-bloom on her lovely face, her children growing up there.

With a long sigh, Owen let the vision go. The warm, human things of life had come very near to him, but he had not known how to hold them. Some subtle, inner sense

warned him that Valeria had done well to betake herself and the rich gifts of her ardent nature to the simple and primitive life of the colonies and the man who was offering that life to her.

He went away to make his preparations for leaving St. Gwenllian.

Valeria's wedding, not unnaturally, provided no occasion for festivity.

The bride herself remarked in private to her sisters :

" I feel exactly as though I was one of those unfortunate girls who come to father for him to marry them so as to ' make honest women of them ' at the eleventh hour. You know the way that sort of wedding is hurried through, in a hole-and-corner style. . . . "

" It's lucky for you you've got a good deal of your trousseau made already," was Lucilla's practical reply.

" Yes, and ' V. Q. ' embroidered on more than half of it ! " cried Val hysterically.

" You can't possibly use it," Flora declared austerely.  
" Unless I can alter it for you in time."

" Of course she can use it," said Lucilla.

Valeria left them both. In the overstrained condition of her nerves, Lucilla's crudely-worded common-sense and Flora's fastidiousness were equally little to her taste. Her father's sorrowful gravity struck her with despair, and Owen Quentillian's magnanimous detachment puzzled her sincerely and made her doubly remorseful.

It was only when George Cuscaden was actually with her that she knew with real certainty that she had done right at the last moment.

On the night before her wedding, Canon M orchard

called Valeria, gave her his blessing and forgiveness, and handed to her some of her dead mother's jewellery.

"God bless and help you in the way that you have chosen, and may He bring all things together for good, as He alone can do."

"Forgive me, father."

"My child, I have nothing to forgive. It was not I whom you wronged, but yourself—and one other. His pardon is yours, fully and freely, as you know well. And now, my Valeria, you owe it to your husband to put the past behind you. You will enter into your new life purified by that very sense of past error, humbled by repentance."

The Canon's voice was very gentle.

It was long after midnight when Valeria heard him go upstairs.

George Cuscaden and Valeria were married by Mr. Clover immediately after Matins next day, and Canon Mordard, throughout the ceremony, knelt with his face hidden by his hand.

The sense of irrevocability that comes to most brides assailed Valeria irresistibly for a moment as she walked, alone with her husband, the short distance from the church to St. Gwenllian.

She glanced up at him, and in the look that met hers she found all the reassurance that she was ever to need.

"A new life, and a new world, my Val. We're going to face things together now."

She was no longer afraid or doubtful, but felt the strangest rush of pure exhilaration.

It was her justification for the past.

"A new life, and a new world," she repeated dreamily. "We're going to be very happy, in spite of everything that's happened."

"We *are* very happy," said George Cuscaden firmly, her hand held fast in his.

"I think they'll forgive me, at home, in time. Father was very kind last night, and Flossie and Lucilla have been so good."

"Val, my darling," said the young man very seriously, "there's one thing I do want to say, and you mustn't mind. You've got to leave the past behind you now. Isn't there something or other in the Bible about forgetting thy father's house and thine own people?"

"Something like that."

"Well, I don't really mean forgetting them, you know. But you've got your own life now, and it isn't going to run on the old lines any more. It seems to me there's been such a lot of talking and thinking in your life up to now that there's been no room for doing anything. You and I are going to change all that."

"Yes, George," said Valeria.

She had, mysteriously, become absolutely happy and absolutely secure. Nothing mattered any more at all except the fact that George and she had found one another in time.

And she was able to surmise, not without a smile, that she had that moment heard almost the only Scriptural quotation from her husband of which he was ever likely to deliver himself.

Quotations, collections, barren discussions, abstract ideals, all lay behind her. In future her preoccupations would concern the health and welfare of her husband and perhaps his children, food and clothing and warmth, pots and pans, and the work of her own hands.

And from the depths of her heart Valeria was glad.



II  
**ADRIAN**



## II

ADRIAN

(1)

" You know, I can't help thinking you've been all wrong about this business of Val's," Adrian said reproachfully to his remaining sisters.

Lucilla seemed singularly undisturbed by the distressing pronouncement, but Flora said anxiously :

" Why, Adrian ? "

" Well, look how frightfully hard it is on the rest of us. You know what father is—he'll be days and days, if not months and months, getting over this, and it'll put him dead against anything of that sort for life."

" These things don't happen twice in one family, I hope," said Lucilla. " Neither Flora nor I are particularly likely to break off one engagement and enter into another and get married and go off to Canada, all inside a week."

" You girls never think of anybody but yourselves."

" Are you thinking of doing anything like that, then, Adrian ? "

Lucilla appeared mildly amused and not at all impressed by the probability of her own suggestion.

" How can I think of doing anything at all when I can't get a decent job and only have a nominal allowance ? I know father can't afford more, and we're all in the same

box—and then Val goes and marries a chap like Cuscaden, who hasn't a penny, when she could have had a fellow with a decent little property and some money of his own, besides what I suppose he makes by writing. Why, just think what she could have done for all of us!"

Lucilla laughed outright.

"It wouldn't have made millionaires of us if she had married Owen."

"Well, I can't say I blame her, from one point of view," Adrian conceded. "A more absolute prig than Owen has turned into, I never wish to meet. You know he won't promise me the living at Stear?"

"The living at Stear?"

Flora looked at her brother in all but speechless astonishment, and Lucilla observed that a living was usually offered to a clergyman.

"And is there any reason why I shouldn't go into the Church?" Adrian enquired, in counter-irony. "Goodness knows there was enough talk about it before the war, and it would please the governor frightfully. In fact, really, I'm thinking of him as much as anything. He was disappointed about old David going into the army, and he's frightfully cut up about Val, and he may as well get a little comfort out of one of us. And I really don't dislike the idea much, especially if it means a settled income in a couple of years' time."

Lucilla got up.

"Talk to Mr. Clover before you say anything to father," she advised. "Flossie, I'm going to see about turning Val's class over to that girl in the Close."

Flora looked at Adrian with grave, unhumorous eyes.

"You don't realise what father would feel about your speaking of going into the priesthood in that sort of way."

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Adrian. You have no faintest vocation to the life of a clergyman."

"What do you know about it? I'm the only person who can judge of that."

"It lies between you and your conscience, certainly. But if you suppose that father, with all his experience, would be satisfied with any but the highest motives——"

She stopped expressively.

"There may be different opinions as to what the highest motives *are*," said Adrian. "I wish this business of Val's hadn't put it out of the question to ask Owen anything."

"Owen is coming to Stear in another month. I am quite certain that he doesn't mean to let this make any difference, and you can ask him anything you want to. But really and truly, Adrian, if this suggestion wasn't so absolutely wild, I should call it most irreverent."

It was evident that Flora had uttered the most profound condemnation of which she was capable.

That night she enquired of Lucilla whether it was Adrian's infatuation for Miss Duffle that had brought to birth his strangely sudden desire for clerical life.

"I suppose so."

"But apart from everything else, he's much too young to marry. And I don't suppose she'd look at him."

"Neither do I. So we needn't worry about it."

"I feel as if Adrian was somebody quite new, whom I'd never known before."

"He's only growing up."

"Does father really know Adrian?"

Lucilla shook her head.

Both missed Valeria, and the mournful haste with which she had been equipped for her wedding and immediate

departure for Canada had left them with a curious sense of having come through a great catastrophe.

The Canon was more profoundly depressed than they had ever seen him, and rarely spoke. The reduced number of people present at every meal rendered more significant the abysmal silence of each gathering.

Owen Quentillian, who had at first shown no marked disposition to take an immediate departure from St. Gwenllian, had been constrained to do so by the Canon's grieved air of perceiving for him no other alternative.

The house bore a stricken aspect.

Only Adrian retained a sort of uneasy jauntiness that petered away into silence in the presence of his father.

Canon Morchard's presence, however, was far more withdrawn than usual from his family circle. Always energetic, he seemed able to find innumerable claims upon his time, and after the daily adjustment of these the study door was apt to shut upon him decisively.

At dinner-time only were they certain of seeing him, and the resultant gloom was of a nature that induced Adrian, far more affected by it than either of his sisters appeared to be, to invite the innocuous Mr. Clover to dinner very soon after Valeria's departure.

The curate was always ready to promote conversation, and sincerely supposed that his efforts must be consolatory to his hosts. His attempts took the form habitual to him of slightly self-evident remarks upon whatever caught his eye in his surroundings.

"Ha! Clover, dear man?" The Canon's voice was sepulchral rather than cordial. "Sit ye down—sit ye down."

Mr. Clover made a few timid remarks to his neighbour, Flora, and wished that it had been Lucilla. He was

always rather frightened of the silent Flora, and showed his alarmed consciousness of her musical talent by enquiring :

“ And how is the organ ? ”

“ What have we here, Lucilla ? ” said the Canon gravely, although the dish of cutlets was of an unmistakable nature.

He often made use of the phrase, and on this occasion it bore an inflexion of disapproval that was evidently not inspired by the cutlets themselves, but by some inner, more profound discontent.

“ Cutlets in a silver dish,” said Mr. Clover.

“ Do you know that the Admastons are getting up a theatrical show ? ” Adrian enquired. “ Good idea, isn’t it ? ”

“ I didn’t know any of them could act,” said Flora.

“ Oh, they’ve got friends and people. I tell you who’s awfully good—Olga Duffle. She’s going to stay on for the performance. As a matter of fact, they’ve asked me to help get the thing up.”

Adrian’s elaborately casual tone did not prevent anyone except Lucilla from glancing surreptitiously at the Canon to see how the announcement was received.

The Canon was frowning heavily.

“ No one has more sympathy than myself with any diversions for young people, but the modern craze for amusement is carried too far. What is it that your friends are proposing to do, Adrian ? ”

“ Just get up a musical show—a sort of Pierrot entertainment. It’ll be mostly singing and dancing, I expect.”

“ I presume they have a charitable object in view ? ”

“ I suppose so,” returned Adrian, in a tone that conveyed with sufficient accuracy to the majority of his hearers that he had no reason for supposing anything of the sort.

“ The youth of to-day is an amazement to me,” said the

Canon impressively. "After coming through Armageddon, the young men and young women of the present generation seem given over to a spirit of triviality—I can call it nothing else—that amazes me. There is no humour to-day—there is 'ragging' or 'rotting.' There is no dancing—there is 'fox-trotting' and 'jazzing.' There is no dressing, with beauty and dignity, for young womanhood—there is blatant indecency, and an aping of a class that I cannot even name in this room. There is no art, no drama, no literature—there are *revues*, and a new class of novel of which I cannot even trust myself to speak."

The Canon drew a long breath, and Adrian murmured sub-audibly :

" And fifthly, and lastly—— "

Mr. Clover gazed at the bowl in the middle of the table and said :

" Very—very nice maidenhair," in a rapid undertone, and Canon Mordard resumed.

" I yield to no one, as you young folk here should readily admit, in my appreciation of the lighter side of life. I believe, indeed, that I have poked some shrewd enough fun in my day at those who would have us believe that this world is a gloomy place. Rather would I say, in the old words we all know : ' A merry heart goes all the way, but a sad one tarries in a mile—ah!' You children can very well vouch for the amount of innocent amusement and recreation that has gone on amongst us. Our Sunday walks, our collecting crazes, our family quips in which young and old have taken full share—with deference due, be it understood, with deference due—our evening readings aloud—I think all these, if they have been an entertainment, have also provided a certain instruction. And that is as it should be, let me tell you, young people—as it should be."

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" My father read aloud the whole of the Waverley novels to us when we were children," Lucilla explained to the curate.

" Nowadays, I am given to understand that children read an illustrated supplement entitled *Comic Cuts*," said the Canon bitterly.

" Pretty Wedgwood plate," came in an aside from Mr. Clover.

" There is a reaction even against Tennyson, that king of song!" thundered the Canon.

" Most of all against Tennyson, according to Owen Quentillian," said Adrian rather maliciously.

" Owen is tainted by the folly of the day, undoubtedly—but I cannot but believe that a young man of intellectual calibre such as his will learn to distinguish the true from the false in time. Owen is 'the child of many prayers,'" said the Canon, with a sudden softening of his voice.

A moment later he sighed heavily.

The direction of his thoughts was only too evidently concerned with the recent disastrous turn taken by Quentillian's *affaire de cœur*.

" What is the programme of your friends' entertainment?" the curate timorously enquired of Adrian.

" Well, they've not really worked out the details yet, but I've been asked to go over there this afternoon and help them settle. Of course, Miss Duffle will sing, and she's promised to do a step-dance, and she and I thought of getting up a play of some kind."

" You are not in a position to bind yourself to anything of that sort, Adrian," said the Canon hastily. " I would have you realise that this supineness cannot go on. You appear to forget that you have to find some work for yourself."

It was so seldom that Canon Mordard vented his feelings upon his younger son that an appalled silence followed his words, rendering them the more noticeable.

Then Mr. Clover said :

"Half—past—eight," in time to the chiming of the clock on the mantelpiece, and there was another silence.

Adrian looked sulky, and Flora nervous. The curate gazed across the table at Lucilla, and enquired :

"What news from India ? "

It was the head of the house who replied.

"David is strangely lax as a correspondent, Clover, strangely lax. Flora there is favoured with a letter more often than most of us—or should I rather say less seldom ? And yet it costs so little to send a few lines regularly to the loving ones at home ! You young folk little think what you are laying up for yourselves in the years to come by neglecting tokens that may appear trivial at the time. The unspoken kind word, the unwritten affectionate letter—how they come back to haunt us, later on ! "

It almost appeared that these non-existent symbols were haunting St. Gwenllian at once, so heavily did the shadow of David's remissness hang over the dinner-table.

The Canon alternated between fits of profound and cataclysmic silence, during which he ate nothing and his eyes became grave and fixed in their unhappiness, and outbursts of vehement discursiveness that not infrequently took the form of rhetorical remonstrances addressed to an audience only too willing to agree with him.

The consciousness of his grief pervaded the atmosphere. No one could be unaware of it. His children, indeed, knew of old the successive stages of anger, morose irritability, and heart-broken remorse to which mental suffering reduced their father.

Mr. Clover's ineptitudes fell upon these pauses and remained unanswered.

Gradually the little man's kind, anxious face showed a faint reflection of the misery that was so plainly to be read upon the Canon's.

Flora's face looked set in its gravity, Adrian was frankly sulky and resentful, and Lucilla's impassivity was tinged with regretfulness.

Outside sounds struck almost with violence upon the silence within, and Mr. Clover murmured distressfully :

"A motor going along the road, towards the town."

"The craze for rapid transport is ruining our English countryside," said the Canon. "Frankly, I cannot away with it. What profit or pleasure can there be in whirling past unseen scenery, leaving clouds of dust and an evil odour behind?"

No one attempted to defend the satisfaction to be derived from the practice so epitomised, and the Canon after a moment pushed back his chair.

"Don't move—do not move on any account. Clover, you will pardon me, I know. I have a great deal of writing to get through. I shall require no coffee, Lucilla."

He went out of the room, unsmiling, and with a slow, dejected step, his grey head a little bowed forward.

"How long is this going to last?" enquired Adrian, after a moment.

No one attempted to misunderstand his meaning.

"The worst of it is that he'll be still more unhappy a little later on, when he realises that his depression has reacted on all of us," said Flora.

"In the meantime, Adrian, I strongly advise you to find a job and begin to work at it," Lucilla added.

"Your father is very, very much depressed," said Mr. Clover.

Adrian appeared to ponder these encouraging statements, and then he observed:

"Well, I don't seem to be doing any good by staying here, so I think the best thing I can do is to accept the Admastons' invitation and go over there and stay until after this show. It'll be much handier for rehearsals, after all."

It may be supposed that this reason, however adequate in fact, was not put forward, unsupported, by Lucilla, upon whom Adrian as a matter of course devolved the task of announcing his immediate intentions to the Canon.

"Let it be understood that he makes no further engagement of the kind," said the Canon curtly. "I cannot interfere with his promise to these people, but this state of affairs must end. I will speak to him before he goes. Adrian is only a boy still, for all his war experience."

There was the indulgent note in his voice that always crept there sooner or later when speaking of his youngest child.

Adrian went to the Admastons, and St. Gwenllian became used to the silence. Gradually the Canon resumed his habits of reading aloud after dinner, and of exchanging small items of general and parish news with his family during meals.

He seldom mentioned Valeria, but they knew that he had written to her.

He spoke of her again when an invitation came from the Admastons to witness their entertainment—an invitation which Adrian, it was evident to his sisters, cheerfully took it for granted that his father would refuse.

"It is very soon—very soon indeed—to meet our neighbours after this unhappy affair of Valeria's, that I fear has

been only too much talked about. But it may be right to accept—it may be right. I cannot wish to disappoint the dear Adrian, either, though I am out of tune with gaieties at present. I will think over it, Lucilla, my dear, and let you know what answer to return."

Lucilla, according to her wont, uttered no opinion, until Flora said to her :

"Wouldn't it be better if we didn't go to these theatricals? Won't father dislike them very much?"

"Very much indeed, I should imagine."

"And do you suppose Adrian *wants* us to be there?"

"Probably not."

They looked at one another, Lucilla with a certain rueful humorousness, Flora with none at all.

"But, Lucilla, can't you stop him?"

"I shouldn't think so."

Miss Mordard was always philosophical rather than enterprising.

The Canon's decision was communicated to his daughters a few days later.

"I have pondered this matter, my daughters, trivial though it be in itself. And it seems to me that we should do well to accept Mrs. Admaston's invitation. Lucilla, you are my secretary. . . . And one thing more, my daughters."

The Canon's glance rested upon Flora, upon whose face a shade of dismay had fallen.

"One thing more. '*God loveth a cheerful giver.*' Even though it costs us something, let us go with a good grace. We owe it to Valeria, to our dear erring one, to show that she is wholeheartedly forgiven. Yes, I can say it now, my children. I have written my full and free forgiveness to your sister. The cloud has lifted."

If so, it appeared to have done so only with a view to descending upon other members of the Mordard *ménage*.

Neither Lucilla nor Flora prepared for the Admaston's party with any feelings save those of profound apprehension, and Adrian, meeting them in the hall, drew Lucilla aside in order to ask indignantly :

"Couldn't you have stopped father from coming to-night? I don't want to be a beast, but really, it's quite out of his line, and he won't enjoy himself. In fact, he'll probably be sick."

The aspirant to the ministry was garbed as a Pierrot, with a curiously-shaped black patch upon his cheek, revealed as a miniature couple of dancers intertwined.

"Olga made it—isn't it ripping?" said Adrian of this masterpiece. "I can't wait—I ought to be behind the scenes at this minute. I came to look for some salts or something—Olga's most awfully nervous. She's simply shaking. What's the proper thing to do for her, Lucilla? She's really most awfully upset."

"What about?"

"Stage fright, I tell you. Really good actors and actresses always get it. I wish I could get hold of some champagne for her."

"Try standing over her with the water-jug," Lucilla suggested crisply, and thereby deprived herself of her brother's presence.

The Canon was always apt, at any gathering, to require a daughter upon either side, although he knew almost everyone in the county, and met old friends with a great and urbane pleasure. On this occasion his eyes roved in vain for Flora.

She had murmured to Lucilla: "I don't think I can bear it. Even Maud Admaston says they're all going to

be very *silly*, and I know father will loathe it. I'll change places later if you want me to."

She had then disappeared to the very back of the large billiard-room, at one end of which a stage and curtains had been erected.

Their hostess, with what Lucilla inwardly qualified as misguided kindness, conducted the Canon to a seat near the top of the room.

Lucilla resignedly took her place beside him.

"Capital, capital!" said the Canon genially. "But where is my little Flora?"

"I think she found someone who wanted to talk to her."

"Flora is still timid—very timid. I fear that Flora has let slip her chance of joining our little family group. I should have enjoyed having a daughter on either side of me, to exchange impressions."

The first item on the heterogeneous programme, however, was provocative of no very eloquent exchange of impressions between Canon Mordard and anyone else.

He listened with a faint air of surprise to an opening chorus from a row of Pierrots and Pierrettes, interspersed with various noises from a whistle, a comb, a pair of castanets, and a small and solid poker banged loudly and intermittently against a tin tray.

At the close of it he only said :

"I hardly recognised our dear lad at first. That was he, was it not, at the end of the row, next to the little lady with black hair?"

"Yes. The girl was Olga Duffle. I believe she sings a great deal."

The literal truth of her own description was borne in upon Lucilla as the evening went on. . . . Miss Duffle did sing a great deal.

She sang a solo about the Moon, and another one about a Coal-black Baby Rose, and a third one, very short and modern and rather indeterminate, asking where was now the flow'r that had died within an hour, and ending on the still more poignant enquiry, addressed to *le bon dieu* above, where was one who said "I love"?

The Canon, to this item, only asked in a puzzled way if the end was not rather abrupt?

"What in my day we should have termed an unresolved discord," he observed with some slight severity.

The sudden introduction of a quantity of toy balloons amongst the audience did not amuse him in the least, although he smiled, coldly and politely, as the guests, with little screams, buffeted them lightly from one to another.

Only the people on the stage, all very young, seemed thoroughly to realise the function of the toy balloons.

They banged them hither and thither, shrieking with laughter when the inevitable destruction ensued, and making each miniature explosion an excuse for calling out the catchword of the evening—imported from a *revue* comedian whose methods, more or less successfully imitated by most of the young men on the stage, appeared to consist in the making of grotesque facial contortions—"May—I—ask—you—politely—to—*absquatulate*?"

At each repetition of the phrase, the actors and actresses were overcome with mirth.

The members of the audience were more divided in their opinions. Their laughter was not immoderate, and that of Canon M orchard was non-existent.

Lucilla, gazing anxiously at his severe profile, was yet able to feel it some slight relief that at least Owen Quen-tillian was not present. One such expression of melan-choly beside her was more than enough.

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"I hope I am not what is vulgarly called superior," said the Canon, "but I confess that all this noise appears to me to be little short of senseless. Surely our faculties were given us for some better purpose than pointless, discordant merriment? No one is more ready than myself to concede——"

The upheaval of an enormous drum on to the stage debarred Lucilla from hearing what it was that no one was more ready than her father to concede, and she was left, amidst ever-increasing din, to judge from his exceedingly uncompromising expression how much more of the performance would elapse without causing him to become what was vulgarly called superior.

(II)

Lucilla Mordard was not naturally of a sanguine disposition, and it must have been an optimist indeed who would have ventured to augur that the effect of the evening's entertainment might be of benefit to the Canon's spirits:

From placidity he passed to tolerance, and from tolerance to endurance. In the course of the short play that concluded the performance Lucilla perceived with resigned dismay that endurance was turning rapidly to serious vexation.

"Extravagant, vulgar, decadent nonsense," was the Canon's verdict, and Lucilla's critical faculty endorsed the trenchant adjectives that he had selected, although she was devoid of her parent's apparently acute sense of disgust.

"Olga Duffle is a good actress," she said.

"One dislikes the *levity* of it all so profoundly," said the Canon. "I believe I am the last man in the world to hold

back from any cheerful, innocent amusement at fit and proper times and seasons, but I cannot but regret that Adrian, naturally gifted as he is, should turn his talents to no better account than mere buffoonery."

The part relegated to Adrian in the little play was indeed of no exalted order, and the most subtle display of humour conceded to him was concerned with the sudden removal of a chair behind him and his consequent fall on to the floor.

The audience laughed, with mild amusement.

Lucilla flared not look at her father.

A spirited speech from Olga Duffle, who had shown no signs whatever of the stage fright that had caused her fellow-actor so much solicitude, brought down the curtain. Lucilla's applause was rendered vigorous by an impulse of extreme thankfulness.

She was also grateful to the Canon for the measured tapping of the palm of one hand aga'inst the back of the other with which he rewarded a performance that he had certainly found to be neither instructive nor amusing.

Adrian sought no parental congratulations when the performers, still in theatrical costume, came down amongst the audience, but Olga Duffle made her way towards the Canon.

She looked, as usual, more attractive than any of the prettier girls present, and spoke with her habitual childlike, almost imperceptible, suggestion of lisping.

" Didn't you think us all very silly ? I'm afraid we were, but so few people care for anything else nowadays."

Her glance and gesture eloquently numbered the Canon in the few, though she did not extend the implication quite so far as to include Lucilla.

" You are a good actress, Miss Duffle. Have you had training ? "

"Oh no, nothing to speak of," said Olga modestly. "They did offer to give me a year at the big dramatic training place, free, after I'd acted in a charity matinée a few years ago in London. They said I could easily play juvenile lead in any theatre in London at the end of a year, but of course that was all nonsense. Anyway, my people naturally wouldn't hear of it."

"Indeed. Certainly it is a very moot point how far the possession of a definite talent justifies embracing a life such as that of a professional actress must needs be."

"Yes, isn't it?" said Olga.

Her big dark eyes were fixed on the Canon's face, her lips parted with the expression of absorbed interest that lent her charm as a listener.

Lucilla was not surprised to see that the Canon's face relaxed as he looked down at the small, up-gazing figure.

She left them, in response to an imperious glance directed upon her from the other end of the room.

"I particularly want the old man to get to know Olga," said Adrian with agitation. "It'd do him all the good in the world to have some of his ideas about the modern girl put straight, and if anyone can do it, she can. Wasn't it priceless of her to make straight for him like that?"

"Perhaps she likes to talk to a distinguished man."

"My dear old thing, don't be absurd. Why, Olga has half London at her feet."

Lucilla felt unable to make any display of enthusiasm at the announcement, although she saw no reason to doubt that a substratum of fact underlay Adrian's hyperbole.

"I suppose father thought the whole show utter tripe?"

"He didn't say so," Lucilla observed dryly.

"Well, for goodness' sake get him away as soon as Olga's had her talk with him. The Admastons are determined to

turn the whole thing into a gorgeous rag, and it'll go on till all hours. Father would be wretched, and besides, I should have him on my mind the whole time. I daresay I shan't have many more opportunities of enjoying myself, so I may as well make the most of this," said Adrian, in a voice charged with meaning, that Lucilla understood to be an allusion to his recent ecclesiastical ambitions.

When she found herself beside her father again he was in conversation with a short, fat, dark man whom he made known to his daughter with a somewhat abstracted air.

"Mr. Duffle, Lucilla."

She was rather amused at the ease with which Olga's parentage could be traced, although, in her, a *retroussé* nose replaced the wide and upturned pug of her father, and her dark, intelligent gaze was an unmistakably improved edition of his shrewd black eyes. From both faces shone the same ardent, restless, and intensely animal vitality.

Mr. Duffle, however, had none of Olga's claims to social charms and talents. Lucilla knew him to be a successful building contractor who had amassed a fortune during the war, and decided that he looked the part.

"I'll come along one morning then, Canon, and have a little chat with you," Mr. Duffle was declaring with a breezy assurance that could hardly have been derived from the Canon's expression. "You're kept pretty hard at it, I daresay?"

"The man who wants me is the man I want," quoted the Canon, with his grave smile.

"Capital. I'll blow along then, and give you a call. My big car is in London, but we've got a little Daimler down here that does very well for country lanes. My daughter, of course, runs her own little two-seater. These young people, nowadays, there's no end to what they expect."

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Not that I grudge Olga anything in reason, you understand. She's our only one, and naturally her mother and I think the world of her."

A very simple pride beamed in his face as he spoke of Olga, and Lucilla congratulated him upon her acting.

"She's pretty good, isn't she? I believe she could take her place amongst professionals any day, so she tells me. But, of course, we shouldn't hear of anything like that for her. In fact, her mother and I look very high for our little girl, very high indeed, I may say, after all that Nature's done for her, and the advantages we've given her as well."

He laughed heartily, and then leaning confidentially towards Lucilla, he said in a semi-whisper:

"Whoever gets our little Olga, young lady, will be a very lucky fellow. There'll be a little bit of"—he tapped his forehead knowingly—"and a little bit of"—the tap was repeated, against his coat-pocket this time. Lucilla required no very acute powers of intuition to refer these demonstrations to her brother's intentions.

She wondered whether the Canon had made a similar deduction.

He was silent during their long drive home, but it was the silence of thoughtfulness rather than that of depression. The Canon's intimates could generally interpret without difficulty the nature of his silences.

On the following morning he called Lucilla into the study.

"I had no word with Adrian last night," he said wistfully. "I saw you talking to him, my dear. Did he tell you what day he is coming home again?"

"No, father."

"I confess that I am perturbed. Are these new friends of his gentlefolk, are they Church people, are they even

Christians?" said the Canon, walking up and down. "If only the boy would be more unreserved with me! One is so terribly anxious."

"I don't think he wants to be reserved. He really has no serious suggestion to offer as to the future."

"My poor lad! He is not sufficiently in earnest. I have blinded myself to it long enough. His early piety and simplicity were so beautiful that perhaps I dwelt upon them as tokens of future growth more than I should have done. But there was a levity of tone about these intimates of his that displeased me greatly. It must cease, Lucilla—this intercourse must cease."

Lucilla dreaded few things more than such resolutions, from which she knew that her father, at whatever cost to himself or to anybody else, never swerved.

"The Admastons are neighbours," she pointed out.

"All the more reason for Adrian to be content to meet them in the ordinary course of events, without treating their house as an hotel. But there is a further attraction, Lucilla—I am convinced of it."

The Canon dropped his voice to impart this piece of penetration.

"That little Miss Duffle is undoubtedly attractive, but can the boy have the incredible folly to be paying his addresses to her?"

It did not seem to Lucilla that any such formal term could possibly be applied to Adrian's highly modern methods of displaying his admiration for Olga, and she informed her father so with decision.

"He must at all events be aware that he is in no position to render any young lady conspicuous by his attentions," said the Canon. "I am displeased with Adrian, Lucilla."

Canon Mordard was not alone in his displeasure. Two

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days after the theatraclals, Olga Duffle's father appeared at St. Gwenllian, and was shown into the study.

The Canon greeted him, his habitual rather stately courtesy in strong contrast to his visitor's bluff curtness of manner.

"Sit you down, my dear sir."

The Canon took his own place on the revolving chair before the writing-table, and the tips of his fingers were lightly joined together as he bent his gaze, benignant and yet serious, upon the little building contractor.

"You've got a nice little old place here. Needs a lot of seeing to, though, I daresay. I see you haven't the electric light."

The Canon glanced round him as though he had hardly noticed, as indeed he had not, the absence of this modern advantage.

"It wouldn't cost you more than a couple of hundred to put it in," said Mr. Duffle negligently.

The Canon was not in the least interested in the problematical expense to be thus incurred, but he replied gently that perhaps one of these days his successor might wish to improve St. Gwenllian, and be in a position to do so.

"Ah," said Mr. Duffle ; "that brings me to my point, in a roundabout sort of way. Your young man, Canon, has no particular inheritance to look forward to, if I understand rightly ? "

"My young man ? "

"Your boy Adrian. Not even your eldest son, is he ? "

"Adrian is the youngest of my five children," said the Canon with peculiar distinctness. "I have two sons and three daughters. May I enquire the reason of this interest in my family ? "

"No offence, I hope, Canon. I thought you'd have

guessed the reason fast enough—my girl Olga. Now mind you, I know very well that boys will be boys, and girls girls, for the matter of that. I'm not even saying that the little monkey hasn't led him on a bit—she leads 'em all on, come to that! But Master Adrian has been talking of an engagement, it seems, and that won't do at all, you know. So I thought you and me, Canon——”

“Stop!” The Canon's face was rigid. “Am I to understand that your daughter has reason to complain that my son presses undesired attentions upon her, or causes their names to be coupled together in a manner displeasing to her?”

The builder's stare was one of honest bewilderment.

“Coupled together!” he repeated derisively. “Why, the lad follows her about like a little dog! I should think old Mathew Admaston is as easy-going as they make 'em, but even he thought it a bit thick to have your young moon-calf, if you'll excuse the expression, on his doorstep morning, noon and night, while my girl was in the house, till they had to ask him to stay, to save the front-door bell coming off in his hand.”

Mr. Duffle's humorous extravagance of imagery awoke no response in Canon Mordard.

“My son's impertinent folly shall be put a stop to immediately,” he said, through closely compressed lips.

“Bless me, there's nothing that needs a rumpus made about it, you understand! Only when it comes to prating about being engaged, and promising to marry him in goodness knows how many years, and goodness knows what on, why then it's time us older folk stepped in, I think, and I'm sure you'll agree with me.”

“Do I understand that my son—without reference to me,

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I may add—has asked Miss Duffle to do him the honour of becoming his wife ? ”

Mr. Duffle stared at the Canon blankly.

“ Ill though he seems to have behaved, you will hardly expect me to accept, on his behalf, an entire rejection of his suit, without reference to the young lady herself ? ”

A resounding blow from Mr. Duffle’s open palm on to his knee startled the Canon and made him jump in his chair.

“ Good God ! ” roared the builder, causing Canon Morchard to wince a second time, “ is this talk out of a novel ? How in the name of all that’s reasonable can the boy marry without a profession or an income ? I’ll do him the justice to say that I’ve never thought him a fortune-hunter. (He’s not got the guts for that, if you’ll excuse me being so plain-spoken.) He’s besotted about the girl, and not the first one either, though I do say it myself. But my Olga is our only child, and will get every penny I have to leave, and the fact of the matter is that she’ll be a rich woman one of these days, in a manner of speaking. Therefore, Canon, you’ll understand me when I say that Olga can look higher—very high, she can look.”

The Canon’s countenance did, indeed, show the most complete comprehension of the case so stated. His face, in its stern pallor, became more cameo-like than ever.

“ Sir, do you accuse my son of trifling, of the unutterable meanness of endeavouring to engage a young lady’s affections without any reasonable prospect of asking her in marriage like an honourable man ? ”

“ Bless me, Canon, I don’t accuse the young fellow of anything, except of being a bit of an ass ! ” said the builder. “ I daresay it’s been six of one and half a dozen of the other. He’s a nice-looking boy, and all this play-acting has thrown them together like, but that’s over now, and Olga comes

back to London with us next week. But I thought I'd throw you a hint," said Mr. Duffle delicately, "so that there's no nonsense about following us to town, or anything of that sort. Her mother's going to speak to Olga about it too. Bless me, it's not the first time we've had to nip a little affair of this sort in the bud! The fellows are round our little girl like flies round a honey-pot. We give her a loose rein, too, in a manner of speaking, but as the wife pointed out to me last night, it only keeps off better chances if a girl is always seen about with lads who don't mean business."

The Canon groaned deeply, and Mr. Duffle, fearing himself misunderstood, hastily interposed.

"Don't run away with the idea that I've anything against the boy, now, Canon. I'm sure if he was only a year or two older, in a good job, and with a little something to look to later on, I'd be only too glad of the connection. But as things are, I'm sure, as a family man yourself, you see my point."

He looked almost pleadingly at the Canon as he spoke.

"You did perfectly right to come to me, Mr. Duffle, you did perfectly right. Unspeakably painful though this conversation has been to me, I fully recognise the necessity for it."

If Mr. Duffle still looked perplexed, he also looked relieved.

"That's right, Canon. I felt you and me would understand one another. After all, we've been young ourselves, haven't we, and I daresay we've chased a pretty pair of ankles, or said more than we meant on a moonlight night, both of us, once upon a time."

So far did Canon Mordard appear to be from endorsing this view of a joint past, that his visitor added in extenuation:

"Of course, before you turned parson, naturally, I mean. I know you take your job seriously, if you'll excuse me passing a personal remark, and that's not more than's needed nowadays. There's no idea of young Adrian going in for the clerical line, I suppose?"

"What I have heard to-day would be enough to convince me that it is out of the question," said the Canon bitterly. "But my son has evinced no such desire."

"H'm. There was some nonsense talked amongst the young people about a fat living at Stear being ready for him if he chose to step into it. I daresay there was nothing in it but a leg-pull, as they say. In any case, my girl wouldn't look at a countryparson. No offence to you, Canon, but it's best to have these things out in plain English."

"Enough!" said the Canon with decision. "You may rest assured that my son will cease this insensate persecution of—"

"Excuse me interrupting, but why make a mountain out of a molehill? There's been no persecution or any of that talk out of books in the case. Why, my Olga can't help making eyes at a good-looking lad, and letting him squeeze her hand every now and then."

The Canon gave utterance, irrepressibly, to yet another groan.

Mr. Duffle looked at him with compassion.

"Why make a mountain out of a molehill, as I said before?" he repeated. "There's been no harm done, except maybe a little gossiping among the Admaston lot, and if you tip the wink to your lad, and mother and I trot Olga back to London again, we needn't hear any more of it. We're old-fashioned people, and we've brought up the child old-fashioned, and she's not one of these modern young women who can't live at home. I give her the best of everything

and a pretty long rope, but she knows that as long as she's living under my roof, and spending my money, she's got to obey me and her mother when we *do* give an order."

The builder's face, momentarily dogged, relaxed again and he laughed jovially.

"Though I'm not saying the little puss can't get most things out of us by coaxing! But we're set on a good marriage for her, that I tell you straight."

"There is only one foundation for the sacrament of marriage," said the Canon sombrely, "and that is mutual love, trust, and esteem."

"Quite, quite—the wife always takes that line herself. 'Where the heart is given, let the hand follow,' she always says, and Olga knows well enough that she'll have a free choice, within reason. But love in a cottage isn't her style, and things being as they are, there's no reason, as I said before, why she shouldn't look high. She's a sensible girl too, and if there *is* a bit of the flirt about her, she doesn't lose her head—I will say that for her."

"I wish that I could say the same of my son," bitterly rejoined the Canon.

"Well, well, don't be too hard on the lad. Human nature is human nature all the world over, is what I always say. All the parsons in Christendom can't alter that, if you'll excuse the saying. It's natural enough your son should lose his head over a pretty girl like my Olga," said Miss Duffle's parent indulgently. "All I mean is, that it must stop there, and no nonsense about being engaged, or anything of that kind."

"Do these unhappy young people consider themselves bound to one another, as far as you know?"

"Bless me, Canon, they're not unhappy. At least, my Olga certainly isn't, and if your lad throws off a few heroics,

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he'll soon get over it. Why, I remember threatening to blow out my brains—as I chose to call them—when I was no older than he is, and all for the sake of a lady ten years older than myself, and married and the mother of three into the bargain!"

Mr. Duffle was moved to hearty laughter at this reminiscence, although it failed signally to produce the same exhilarating effect upon Canon Mordard.

Perhaps in consequence of this, his mirth died away spasmodically, with a rather apologetic effect.

"Well, well, Canon, take a tip from me, if I may suggest such a thing, and don't take this business too seriously. He'll be head over ears in love with somebody else before you can look round, and it'll all be to do over again."

Before this luminous vista of future amatory escapades the builder appeared to feel that the interview had better be brought to its conclusion, and he rose.

An evident desire to console and reassure his host possessed him.

"Get the young fellow a job of work, if I may advise. It's wonderful how it steadies them down. He'll have no time to run after the petticoats when he's tied by the leg to an office, or roughing it in one of the colonies."

"The choice of a career lies in my son's own hands," said the Canon stiffly. "But you may rest assured, Mr. Duffle, that he will be allowed no further occasion for misusing his time and abusing other people's hospitality as he appears to have been doing. I am obliged to you, painful though this conversation has been to us both, for treating me with so much frankness in the matter."

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Duffle.

The Canon bowed slightly and escorted his visitor to the door.

they were doing. Olga is the only girl I shall ever love, and if I have lost her I do not care what I do or what becomes of me, and you may tell father so. If this is what *religion* leads to, you can also tell him that I am utterly off it for life. That is what they have done by their interference with my affairs, because I am almost sure Olga would at least have become engaged to me if she had been let alone, and not bullied by her father and mother, and threatened with *poverty* if she married me. As you know, it needn't have been anything of the sort, if my plans had worked out all right, and we could have had Stear, but I am *completely* off the Church, in any shape or form, so that is what father has done, whether he knows it or not!!!

" You will, I suppose, be upset at this letter being so bitter in tone, but I may say that my faith in human nature is utterly shattered for good and all, and this has been done by my own father!! I am coming home on Monday and *not before*, so it's no use father dictating to me.

" Yours,  
" ADRIAN."

" MY DEAREST ADRIAN,

" I don't understand why Lucilla tells me that you are returning home on Monday, when you know it is my wish, distinctly expressed in my letter to you two days ago, that you should be here on Saturday, so that we may spend the Sunday together. Unless you have a very valid reason for disregarding my wishes, I must insist, for your own sake, upon your complying with them. I do so want you to be *considerate*, quite apart from the question of *dutifulness*; for instance, it is quite a little thing, but you don't say what time you are arriving here, and yet you surely know that this makes a difference with regard to questions of meals, etc., in a small household such as ours. It is only want of thought, dear lad, but do try and correct this fault. I have so often had to reprove myself for the like small negligences that it makes me anxious to see the same tendency in you. This is not a lecture, my dear boy,

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but only a *reminder*, from one who has had to be both mother and father to you.

"I have other, and very much more serious, matters to talk over with you when we meet, but all shall be done in the spirit of love and confidence, I do trust, and if I am obliged to inflict pain upon you, you must remember that it is multiplied tenfold upon my own head.

"I shall expect a line, sent either to myself or to Lucilla, announcing the hour of your arrival on *Saturday*. God by you, dearest of lads, until we meet.

"YOUR DEVOTED FATHER."

"DEAR LUCILLA,

"On second thoughts, I shall come home on Saturday, in time for dinner. Most likely I shall go straight off to London on Monday morning, but you needn't say anything to father about this. If you can, persuade him to have up the port on Sunday night.

"Yours,  
"ADRIAN."

"Dear lad! He is all anxiety to do right, at bottom," said the Canon tenderly to Lucilla, when a censored version of this communication had been passed on to him. "You see how readily he submits to returning on Saturday, in order to please me."

If Lucilla thought this act of submission inspired by fear, rather than by a desire to please, she did not say so.

The Canon had said nothing to her of his interview with Mr. Duffle, and made only one remark which might be held to refer to his visitor.

"We are all of us apt to set a false value on appearances, I suspect. Aye, my daughters, in spite of his 'forty years in the wilderness,' it is so with your father. Trivial vulgarities or mere superficial coarseness have blinded one

time and again, till some sudden, beautiful impulse, or flash of generous delicacy, comes to rebuke one. Well, well—each mistake can be used as a rung of the ladder—always remember that."

That trivial vulgarities and superficial coarseness were characteristics of Mr. Duffle was undeniable, but Lucilla deduced that these had been redeemed in the manner suggested, since the builder's prolonged visit to her father had left him, though grave, singularly calm. He had, indeed, summoned Adrian to St. Gwenllian, but his manner showed none of the peculiar restrained suffering that was always to be discerned when the Canon felt one of his children to be in serious fault.

"It is more than time that Adrian found his vocation," said the Canon. "I have been to blame in allowing him to drift, but it has been an unutterable joy to have him with us, after these terrible war-years. However, there is no further excuse for delay. He and I must have a long talk."

Lucilla could surmise only too well the effect of a long talk upon Adrian, if his frame of mind might be judged correctly from his impassioned letter to her.

As usual, however, she said nothing.

The Canon's mood of mellow forbearance continued to wax as the day went on, and he met his favourite son with a benign affectionateness that contrasted strangely with Adrian's dramatically-restrained demeanour.

Flora, as a rule utterly incurious, asked Lucilla what was the matter.

"I don't quite know. Something to do with Olga Duffle, I imagine. Probably Adrian has proposed to her, or something foolish of the kind, and the Duffles want it stopped."

"Has he said anything more about his idea of taking Orders?"

"I hope not," said Lucilla rather grimly.

She preferred not to imagine the Canon's probable reception of an ambition thus inspired.

The long talk projected by Canon Mordard was impracticable on a Sunday, always his busiest day, until evening.

As the Canon rose from the late, and scrupulously cold, evening meal, he said :

"Daughters, you will not sit up beyond your usual hour. Adrian, my dear—come."

The door of the study shut, and Lucilla and Flora remained in the drawing-room.

Lucilla occupied herself with note-books and works of reference, and Flora, in the exquisite copper-plate handwriting that the Canon had insisted upon for all his children, in close imitation of his own, wrote out an abstract of her father's sermon, as she had done almost every Sunday evening ever since she could remember.

The silence was unbroken till nearly an hour later, when Lucilla observed :

"Do you know, Flossie, that father's book is very nearly finished? There are only two more chapters to revise."

"Leonidas of Alexandria," said Flora thoughtfully.

The subject of the Canon's exhaustive researches and patient compilations was known to the household.

"He'll publish it, of course?"

"He hopes to. But Owen told me that there isn't a very great demand for that kind of work nowadays."

Flora looked enquiringly at her sister.

"I hope father isn't going to be disappointed," she said, half interrogatively.

"I'm very much afraid that he is."

On this encouraging supposition of Miss M orchard's the conversation ended.

In accordance with their father's desire, both sisters had gone upstairs before the conference in the study came to an end.

There came a knock at Lucilla's door.

She opened it.

"Come in, Adrian."

"It's all up," said Adrian, in the eloquent idiom of his generation, and made a melodramatic gesture of desperation.

Lucilla closed the door and sat down, seeming undisturbed by so cataclysmic an announcement of finality.

"I'm off on my own, after this. Father has utterly mucked up my entire life, as I think I told you in my letter, and he can't see what he has done!"

Lucilla wondered whether Adrian had spent two and a half hours in endeavouring to open his parent's eyes to his own work of destruction.

"Would you mind telling me exactly what has happened?"

Adrian embarked upon a tone of gloomy narrative.

"Well, I don't know whether you had any idea that I am—was—well, frightfully hard hit by that girl Olga. Not just thinking her pretty and clever, and all that sort of thing, you know, though of course she was—is, I mean—but simply knowing that she was the one and only person I should ever care for. Of course, I know now that I was mistaken in her, to a certain extent, and I can tell you, Lucilla, that it's very hard on a man to be as thoroughly disillusioned as I've been. It's enough to shatter one's faith in women for life."

"But what did father do?" said Lucilla, as her brother

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seemed inclined to lose himself in the contemplation of his own future misogyny.

"What did he *do*?" echoed Adrian bitterly. "He and old Duffle had the—the audacity to meet together and discuss my private affairs, and take upon themselves to decide that anything between me and Olga ought to be put an end to. I must say I thought that kind of thing had gone out with the Middle Ages, when people walled up their daughters alive, and all that kind of tosh. And how Olga, of all people, put up with it, I can't imagine; but they seemed to have pitched some yarn about my not being able to afford to marry, and frightened her with the idea of my being after her money I suppose."

"But, Adrian, had you asked her to marry you?"

"No, of course not. But I did think we might have been engaged. Then I wouldn't have had to put up with seeing a lot of other fellows after her," said Adrian naïvely.

"And did you explain that to father?" Lucilla enquired, not without a certain dismay in picturing the Canon's reception of these strange ideals.

"More or less, but you know what he is. He always does most of the talking himself. I can quite understand why we were so frightened of him as kids, you know. He seems to work himself up about things, and then he always has such a frightfully high-falutin point of view. We might really have been talking at cross purposes half the time."

"I can quite believe it."

"Of course, I'm not exactly afraid of him now, but it does make it a bit difficult to say what's in one's mind."

"That's just the pity of it, Adrian. He always says that he does so wish you were more unreserved with him. He does very much want you to say what's in your mind."

"But he wouldn't like it if I did—in fact he probably wouldn't understand it."

Few things could be more incontrovertible.

"The fact is, that father has quite a wrong idea of me. He seems to expect me to have all the notions that *he* had, when he was a young high-brow at Oxford, about ninety years ago. As I told him, things have gone ahead a bit since then."

Lucilla, for her consolation, reflected that few people are capable of distinguishing accurately between what they actually say, and what they subsequently wish themselves to have said, when reporting a conversation. It was highly probable that Adrian had been a good deal less eloquent than he represented himself to have been.

"You didn't say anything, did you, about your idea of taking Orders?"

"No," said Adrian rather curtly. "I did begin something about it, just to show that I hadn't been the unpractical ass he seemed to think I was, but he went off at the deep end almost directly. I said something about going into the Church, you see, and he didn't wait for me to finish, but started away about our all being 'in the Church' from the day of our baptism, and so on—splitting hairs, I call it. As if everyone didn't know what is generally meant by going into the Church."

"Well, in this case I really hope he didn't know. Flossie and I always told you that father would be very much shocked at your way of looking at the priesthood."

"Anyhow, it's all off now," said Adrian gloomily. "There wouldn't be the slightest object in it—and besides, I'm thoroughly off religion at the moment, as I think I told you. No, I shall go to London."

Lucilla looked further enquiry.

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"No, I'm not going after Olga, you can be quite easy about that. In fact, I may say I don't ever want to set eyes on her again, after the way she's let me down. No, I'm going to try journalism, or something like that. Anyhow, I mean to be a free lance for a bit."

The first note of real resolution that Lucilla had heard there crept into Adrian's young voice.

"Father really can't go on running the show for me like this. It's me that's got to decide what to do with my life, and I'm going to get a bit of experience on my own. I know I had six months in France, but that isn't going to be the whole of my life. In fact, Lucilla, I've decided, though I'm sorry in a way to say such a thing, that father has got to be taught a lesson, and it's me that's going to do the teaching."

Iron firmness, denoted by a closely compressed mouth and a rather defiant eye fixed glassily upon Lucilla's, characterised Adrian's announcement.

"Listen," said Lucilla.

They heard a heavy footfall, eloquent of weariness, outside the door. It was followed by the sound of an imperative tap.

Adrian's face relaxed and a more normal expression succeeded to the compelling one that had petrified his gaze.

"Adrian, my son, are you there?"

"Yes, father."

"Dear lad, how thoughtless you are! Your sister is tired, and it is already very late. Finish your talk to-morrow, my dear ones."

There was a pause.

Then Adrian said:

"Well, I suppose Time is on the wing, as usual. Good-night, Lucilla."

He went out.

Lucilla heard the Canon bid him good-night, and his voice held profound sadness rather than the vexation that she had feared.

She moved swiftly to the door.

"Father, I have found that reference in Origen."

The Canon's face, drawn and tired, lightened on the instant.

"My indefatigable searcher after truth! Lucilla indeed, casting light into dark places—you were well named, my daughter. That is good news indeed—good news indeed."

"Should you like to come down again, or are you too tired?"

"Nay, Lucilla, you heard me bid Adrian to his room. Would you have me transgress my own regulations? That would be inconsistent indeed. We will investigate our Origen to-morrow."

"You are so near the end of it now, father."

"Aye, the work has progressed wonderfully these last few months. And I have been wonderfully blessed in your help, my child—my right hand! It has been a labour of love throughout."

Lucilla hoped that he would go to his room still cheered by the thought of the book. But the Canon lingered, to enquire sadly:

"You have talked with Adrian?"

"A little."

"Dear fellow, one must make all allowance for the disappointment of his first fancy, but there is a want of stability—what I can only call a levity of spirit—that distresses one beyond words. He was all submission and deference, but there was not the spontaneous calling of deep unto deep that one somehow looked for. . . . And

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yet Adrian is the one of you all from whom I had hoped for the greatest unreserve, the most ideal companionship. . . .”

Lucilla knew it, had always known it, only too well.

Not one of his other children had been treated with the indulgence that the Canon had always displayed towards his youngest-born.

The Canon's next words chimed in oddly with her thoughts.

“Perhaps I have condoned too much in Adrian. It is not a strong character—but the strongest are not always the most lovable. He talks now of going to London.”

“So he told me.”

“One can only trust,” said the Canon with a heavy sigh. “I must bid you good-night, dear daughter. It is not right that you should be kept up in this fashion.”

Lucilla was left to seek what repose she might.

The next day at St. Gwenllian was one of constraint.

Adrian was silent in his father's presence, and full of adamantine resolution in his absence. At meal-times the subjects to be avoided, which now included the Admaston's, theatricals, and the Duffle family, as well as Valeria's marriage, seemed unduly numerous. In the evening the Canon made a great and evident effort, that struck Lucilla as infinitely pathetic, to readjust matters.

His show of laboured brightness could deceive no one, but Lucilla and Mr. Clover seconded his attempts at general conversation with determination, and Flora was not more silent than was her wont. Adrian, manifestly sulky at first, awoke presently to a change in the atmosphere, and thereupon erred rather upon the side of garrulity than on that of constraint.

His face darkened, however, when the Canon after dinner suddenly said with pseudo-heartiness :

"I am about to call one of our old-time family councils, young people. What say you, Adrian, to a little friendly discussion of your future plans? Time was, perhaps, when these things were settled rather in a long, heart-to-heart talk between father and son, but times change, and we must move with them—we must move with them."

It was impossible to doubt that the Canon was, or supposed himself to be, moving with the times rather in the hope of pleasing Adrian than from any personal liking for the direction in which they appeared to be taking him.

"Perhaps some of these wiseacres may make a helpful suggestion as to the future. Clover, you have been guide, philosopher, and friend to us all this many a year. And Lucilla—Lucilla is gifted with a very level head, as I sometimes tell her—a very level head. As for my little Flora, whose head is sometimes in the clouds, at least those who say least see most, eh, Flora? Let us to the withdrawing-room, children."

Seated in the lamplight, with Lucilla and Flora both occupied with needlework—the Canon had long ago decreed that no discussion need entail idle hands—Canon Mordard looked wistfully at Adrian, leaning against the marble mantelpiece with an air of embarrassment.

"What are your wishes, dear lad—your hopes, your plans?"

To this singularly comprehensive enquiry Adrian seemed to find some difficulty in making an immediate reply.

"Your father is very anxious—we're all anxious," said Mr. Clover pleadingly.

"Why should you be?" Adrian demanded fretfully, turning sharply towards the curate. "I'm quite old enough to settle for myself what I'm going to do."

"But you haven't settled it, Adrian," said Lucilla mildly.

"That is why we all want to help you, if possible," the Canon observed. "Perhaps you remember some words that I am very fond of, and that have found their way now and again into our pleasant confabulations on life and letters in general :

'There comes a tide in the affairs of men  
That, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.'

"There is, indeed, a higher Leading that I trust, and indeed know, you would none of you disregard, but opportunity may very often serve us as an indication—an indication. It seems to me, dear Adrian, that some such 'tide' has come in your affairs now, and it would be pleasant indeed to feel that, taken at the flood, it would lead on to fortune, in the best and highest sense of the word."

There was a pause, and then Mr. Clover said :

"Or at least independence."

"That's what I want," said Adrian ungraciously. "Only never having been brought up to anything special, it's a bit hard to know what to go in for."

"You said something about journalism," Lucilla reminded him, aware that the word, which would certainly be distasteful to the Canon, must be uttered sooner or later.

Adrian looked at his sister, and not at his father, as he replied :

"I think that's really what I shall do."

"But who is going to employ you, Adrian?" Flora enquired with simplicity.

The boy frowned.

"You don't understand these things. I shall just get up

one or two things, and show them to the right people, and, if they're any good at all, I shall get taken on somewhere."

"The Press is a great force for good, as, alas, for evil, my son, but I confess that such a course would be a disappointment to me. Have you no other ambition?" asked the Canon wistfully.

"I can't think of anything else, father."

"I thought——" breathed Flora to Lucilla.

Lucilla shook her head, in repudiation of Adrian's erstwhile schemes of clerical life, and she heard from Flora a sigh that probably denoted relief.

"Then, my dearest fellow, so be it. You know that we wish nothing but your highest good, and your happiness here and hereafter. I will increase your present allowance as far as I can do so without robbing others, and that should enable you to maintain yourself in London until you are earning enough to dispense with it. Have you any definite starting-point in your mind?"

"Not yet, but I can write to a fellow I know. I say, father—this is very good of you."

There was both surprise and genuine gratitude in Adrian's voice.

The Canon, entirely regardless of anyone else, as he always was when deeply in earnest, rose and placed his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"I have no wish but your truest and highest good, dear lad, as I said before. If I have been weak enough to indulge in plans and fancies of my own, they shall not come between us now. I believe I may say that I have learnt at last that whatever *is*, is best. Let us go on, believing all things, hoping all things. . . . If there has been weakness in the past, dear Adrian, I *know* that you will justify my confidence in the future, God helping you."

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The Canon's voice had grown husky over the last few words. He bent his head and gently and solemnly kissed Adrian's forehead.

Then he went out of the room.

( iv )

For many months after Adrian's departure the monotonous round of life at St. Gwenllian remained undisturbed.

News came from Canada of the birth of a son to Valeria, and the Canon's last resentment vanished, although he still spoke of "our poor Valeria."

He derived unmistakable satisfaction from Owen Quen-tillian's presence at Stear, and the young man received frequent invitations to the Vicarage, after a first visit during which the host suffered infinitely more than the guest, in the fear of reviving past associations.

Adrian wrote occasionally, giving no very encouraging accounts of his progress in journalism, and continued to receive the increased allowance that his father sent him with scrupulous regularity. He did not come home again, even in the summer.

Then one day the Canon, at his writing-table, laid down his pen and said to Lucilla :

" *Nunc dimittis.* . . . My book is done, Lucilla ; I can add no more to it. It has been a long task, and at times a heavy one, for the flesh is weak—for all that the spirit is willing, the flesh is weak. But it is over now."

His rapt, smiling gaze held Lucilla's for a long while, as she smiled back her congratulation.

" And now, my dear one, to give our work to the world ! "

He rubbed his hands together exultantly. "For it is yours, Lucilla, almost as much as mine."

She shook her head, still smiling. The Canon's generosity, any more than his occasional injustice, did not blind his daughter to the bald facts of a case as she saw it.

A shadow was across her genuine participation in his joy now.

"What shall you do with it, father?"

"There is no more to be done," repeated the Canon. "All is copied, all is corrected. Your typescript is admirable, Lucilla, and I trust that my few emendations have not defaced it."

"Then is it going to the publishers?"

"My practical Lucilla! Is your mind already in search of an adequate supply of brown paper and sealing-wax? These things are not done so hastily as impetuous youth would wish, however. There will be a preliminary correspondence, my dear, even when I have definitely decided which of the publishing houses to approach. A work such as this one, which has taken years of labour, is not sent lightly forth to take its chance, as might be a work of fiction."

The Canon laid his hand lovingly upon the immense pile of typescript before him. It represented, as he had said, the labour of years.

"Owen is in touch with several publishers, I believe."

"Possibly so, Lucilla." The Canon's tone was not altogether pleased. "But such a work--on such a subject--requires no casual introduction."

Lucilla wondered, not without foreboding, what it did require. Owen Quentillian, who shared her own inability to take optimistic views on principle, had spoken discouragingly of the modern market for such works as the Canon's on Leonidas of Alexandria.

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The Canon himself appeared to entertain no misgivings, until a few weeks later, when he handed a letter silently to Lucilla.

It was a courteously-worded assurance from the most eminent of theological publishing firms that the probable sales of such a work as "Leonidas of Alexandria" would not, in their opinion, justify the expenses of publication.

The Canon seemed more bewildered than dismayed.

"I shall approach the Oxbridge Press," he declared. "I had decided against them, but this very unexpected attitude leaves me no alternative."

The reply of the Oxbridge Press, although longer delayed, was almost identical in substance with that of its predecessor's.

"I do not understand it," the Canon repeated, and wrote to another publishing house.

He still spoke as though the ultimate appearance of the book were a certainty, even when confronted with a third refusal; but he allowed Lucilla to consult Owen Quentillian.

As the result of a letter to Quentillian's own publishers, an offer came from them to produce "Leonidas of Alexandria" if the author would advance a substantial sum towards the cost of bringing out the book.

"It's more than I dared to hope for," Owen told Lucilla candidly, in private. "Only I'm afraid he'll still be disappointed if the book appears and makes no stir."

"He has thought of it for so many years," said Lucilla,

"And always as a *magnum opus*—something that the world would recognise?"

"Yes, I think so. But even so, I'm not certain whether he'll accept these terms."

"He won't get better ones," said Owen with conviction.

They awaited the Canon's reply. It came, calm and very decided.

"It cannot be. It is not within my power to accept the terms suggested. Thank you, Owen my dear—and you, Lucilla—but my work must await better days—better days."

For the first time Owen was struck by the singular sweetness of the Canon's smile, as he stood with his hand resting on the great bulk of papers that stood to him for the loving preoccupation of many years. No faintest touch of bitterness accompanied his deep disappointment.

"I have had the great pleasure of the work, and it has brought me into close association with many writers, both living and dead. We have derived great benefit from our toil, Lucilla, and if the fruits of reward are to be denied us yet awhile, so be it. You remember the old story of the dying man who bade his sons dig for a treasure beneath the apple-tree. They did so, and the natural yield of the fertile earth was their reward—their own industry proved to be their treasure. If it is to be so with my book, I am content."

Quentillian's stern sense of the futility of false hopes kept him silent, but Lucilla said :

"Is it any use to try another publisher?"

The Canon shook his grey head.

"This is neither our first attempt nor our second. No doubt times have changed, and there is no longer the same interest taken in these researches. The wheel will come round in due course, young people, and I make no doubt that 'Leonidas' will yet be given to the world in God's good time, whether in my day or not. I am very well content."

He put the heavy package into a drawer, of which he turned the key.

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" You remember, Lucilla, the words inscribed upon my front page—' *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*' ? Surely we can trust the fulfilment of those words to Him, and as surely He can justify them in obscurity as in the notoriety of a day. We will say no more about this, children."

He turned towards Quentillian, and smiled again.

" Nay, dear fellow, there is nothing to look so blank about. I will not deny a natural disappointment, but it is no more than that—no more than that. These things pass. . . ."

Even to Lucilla, in private, the Canon scarcely said more. The one revelation that he did make hardly surprised her.

" All else apart, I could not have paid the money to that publishing firm. The dear Adrian must be my first consideration at present, and with the increased amount that he is receiving the drain upon my purse is too heavy to admit of a personal gratification. Some day the dear fellow will pay it all back, I make no doubt, though even were it not so . . . but it will be so. And now, Lucilla, we will drop the subject. What I have told you is between ourselves, and we need not refer to it again."

A very little while later the Canon began to make minute and elaborate notes for a Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians.

Lucilla, according to her wont, acted as his secretary without comment.

It was more difficult, however, to pursue this course, when the Canon, with a look of distress and perplexity, handed to her several closely-written sheets of paper, and observed :

" As you know, I hold very strongly to the sacredness of personal correspondence. It was, indeed, at least partly on that account that I have said nothing to you of a letter

from Adrian that has caused me some anxiety. He seems to me to be getting amongst a set of people whom I can only call undesirable. They may be leading him into foolish extravagance—I fear it must be so. It seems to me my clear duty to write to the boy very frankly, but God knows how carefully I have weighed every word for fear of saying too much. I believe I am justified in letting you read it. A sister's influence can do much, more especially when she has been obliged to enact the part of mother, and it may even be that Adrian will listen to you more readily than to me."

The Canon sighed heavily.

Although his sudden, sharp outbursts of anger had, at one time or another, included each and every one of his children, his tolerance was always longest where Adrian was concerned. So, too, was his profound distress when the shortcomings of his youngest-born were made only too manifest.

Lucilla read the letter with considerable inward disquiet.

"**MY DEAREST ADRIAN,**

"First and foremost, I enclose a cheque, with which you must *at once* discharge outstanding liabilities. You must not, however, take this as an easy method of getting out of difficulties into which you have placed yourself. I shall stop this money out of your allowance, in justice both to yourself and to me, in quarterly instalments. And now, my son, you must bear with me while I write of several things that seemed to me to be much amiss in your present way of life. Your letters are so far from explicit (how I wish it were otherwise!), that one can only guess at much which is left unsaid, but your request for money, however veiled, is an admission in itself. You write of 'others,' but can you not see that it is absolute *dishonesty* to give presents, stand host at various small outings,

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and the like, when this implies the spending of money that I give you for one purpose on quite another? No one knows better than myself the pleasure to be derived from such little attentions to those whose kindness calls for recognition, or to whom we feel drawn by sympathy, and before whom we perhaps like to pose in the light of a benefactor. Such gratifications are harmless, and may even be beneficial, in themselves, but they are at present amongst the things which you *must* learn to deny yourself. How I wish I could *say* this, instead of writing it! Could you not come to us for a few days, and we would thrash all these matters out together as one can only do in a long, *tête-à-tête* evening talk over the fire, or perhaps a ten-mile tramp far out into the country. Let me know what hope there is of your getting down here, and when.

"In regard to the question of returning hospitality, it does seem to me a most moot point how far such obligations should bind us. Certainly they should not do so *if entailing interference with work or prayer*. You say nothing on these points, so do consider this question next time you write. It is so disappointing to receive short notes, written in haste, telling one nothing of yourself, and with questions in home letters left unanswered. *Do* write more fully of yourself—I am so much disturbed about you, and cannot understand why you should say that you have 'nothing to write about.' *All* is of the deepest interest to those who love you so, and you tell us so little! You give no account of your Sundays, spiritual experiences, private readings and the like, but if this does not come spontaneously, it is of no use to try and force it.

"I should like to hear something, however, of your friends. With whom do you work, spend your Sundays, evening leisure hours, etc.? All these details would be of the greatest interest, and, although one has no wish to press on that particular aspect of the case, they are points upon which your father has every right to information.

"Why did you not tell me of your little sketch in the *Athene*? Owen Quentillian brought it to my notice,

supposing me, naturally, to be aware of its authorship. It seemed to me to be well and brightly written, though perhaps a little trivial in conception, but you have a slip in the first paragraph, line four, where you make 'etomology' do duty for 'entomology.' If this is a printer's error, and you did not correct the proofs yourself, draw your editor's attention to it *at once*. The final quotation from de Musset is, I *think*, incorrect, but I am not sure of this, and cannot verify at present. He is not a writer about whom I care. Do you read much of him?"

At this point Lucilla laid down the letter and said emphatically:

"No, he doesn't. Read de Musset, I mean. Probably he got the verse he quotes out of a book of quotations."

The Canon looked surprised.

"I am aware that modern methods are slip-shod, but Adrian's knowledge of French is much above the average. Our evening readings aloud have seen to that."

Lucilla picked up the sheets of paper again, wondering if there was very much more of the letter to come—a wonder not infrequently felt by those with whom Canon Mordard was in correspondence.

"Do eschew the use of slang *absolutely*, at least in writing! I quite consider that 'stunt' comes under this heading, in your article. It is an Americanism, and so ugly! These criticisms, if such they be, are only the outcome, need I tell you, of my really intense desire that you should do full justice to yourself, and to the talent that I feel sure is in you. And let me repeat again, my dearest lad, that this applies *doubly* to the more serious fault-finding that I have been obliged, as your father, to put into this letter. You must write to me fully and freely if it seems to you that anything which I have said is unjust, but I believe that your own conscience, and the candour that I know is

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yours, will endorse all that I have written. In that case, you will know well where to seek for the *unfailing* strength necessary to a fresh beginning and a full confession of error.

"I cannot tell you with what anxiety I shall await your answer, and do make it a really open-hearted one, as I well know that you *can*. There shall be no cloud upon our meeting when we do meet, once things have been made clear between us by letter, but I do feel that for your own sake, far more than for mine, this strange reticence on your part must not continue.

"Look upon me as your best earthly friend, dear lad, as well as your father, for no one can be more eager to sympathise with you on every point than I am—and have always been. It has always seemed to me that the relationship of father and son could—and should—be an utterly *ideal* one.

"My love to you, as always, and do write *at once*. I must not end this without reminding you that business-like habits, which I am so anxious that you should acquire, make it *obligatory* to acknowledge a cheque by return of post, even were there not other reasons for writing without delay. Anything that you wish treated as confidential will, of course, be sacred—but that you know already.

"In all lovingness, dear Adrian, I remain your most devoted father,

"F. L. M."

"Can I say more?" the Canon enquired sadly and anxiously, as Lucilla laid down the letter. To which Lucilla, with restraint, replied by a bald negative.

"I have weighed every word," her father repeated, with, as she well knew, only too much truth.

"Perhaps Adrian may feel that you are taking him too seriously altogether. He sometimes seems—"

"Whom, and what, should I take seriously if not my son, and his earthly and eternal welfare?" the Canon

interrupted her rather sternly. " You take a great deal upon yourself, Lucilla, in speaking so. No doubt you say to yourself, ' I am young, I am of the period, it is for me to act as interpreter between the parent, who is of another generation, and the youth, who belongs to mine.' But if I read your thought correctly, my child—and I have no doubt that I do—it is an arrogant one, and altogether unworthy of you."

Lucilla did not explain that no such determination had crossed her mind as the self-sufficient one ascribed to her. She was aware, in common with all the Canon's children, that he was prone to attribute to them occasionally motives and attitudes of mind strangely and almost incredibly alien to anything to which they could even reasonably lay claim. Far more often did he credit them with aspirations and intentions of a quite undeserved sublimity.

Her inward fear, that Adrian would probably leave the major part of his father's letter unread, she did not put into words.

" Owen tells me that he is shortly going to London, and I shall make a point of asking him to see our dear fellow, and bring me a full report," said the Canon.

He proffered his request shortly afterwards to Quen-tillian, by whom it was received with no enthusiasm whatever.

" Will Adrian like it ? " he enquired, although fully conscious that Adrian would not.

" Aye, that he will," said the Canon with emphasis. " It is just because we feel you to be so thoroughly one of ourselves, dear Owen, that I am asking you to act the elder brother's part that would be David's, were he at home."

Lucilla could sympathise in the entire absence of elation

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with which Quentillian took his departure under the new honour thus thrust upon him.

There was a certain rueful amusement under his discomfiture when he left St. Gwenllian.

On his return, Lucilla discovered instantly that any lurking amusement had been stifled under a perfectly real anxiety.

"What is it?" she almost involuntarily asked, as she mechanically made her preparations at the tea-table for the Canon's entrance.

"I'm afraid I have news that will distress you all, about Adrian."

"Is he ill?" said Flora.

"No. I'm sorry if I frightened you. He has taken up some work that I'm afraid the Canon will disapprove of—on the staff of Hale's paper."

"What is that?" Flora asked, with grave, innocent eyes.

But Lucilla said at once: "That's the new review that has been so very much criticised for its attitude towards the Church, isn't it?"

He nodded.

"Oh!" Flora caught her breath, and her delicate face expressed the violent and instinctive recoil of her spirit.

Owen looked at Lucilla.

Her indignation took a line that was not altogether what he had expected.

"Well, surely Adrian need not have found a way of asserting his independence that must run counter to everything father has ever taught!"

"He isn't exactly doing it out of the spirit of opposition. Hale has taken a fancy to him, and it's the first chance

Adrian has had of regular, paid work. From a worldly point of view, he'd be a fool not to have accepted it."

"A worldly point of view!" echoed Flora. "One doesn't expect that in father's son, somehow."

Theoretically, Quentillian felt, one didn't.

"Surely Adrian isn't capable of controversial writing?" Flora added, with a severity that saw apparently nothing humorous in the mere suggestion.

"Nothing of that sort will be required of him. He will only write light articles, like that thing you saw in the *Athene*. The point is that he is working for a man like Hale, whose reputation—which is fairly considerable in its own way—rests largely on his very anti-clerical attitude."

"But how can Adrian reconcile that with his duty as a Church member?" said Flora tersely.

"I didn't ask him," was Quentillian's equally terse reply.

They all three remained silent.

"Is Adrian going to write to father, or has he written already?" Flora asked at last.

"He hasn't written."

Lucilla's short-sighted gaze, with the rather intent look characteristic of a difficulty in focussing, rested for a moment upon Quentillian's face. Then she asked quietly:

"Did he ask you to tell father for him?"

"He did."

"How like Adrian," said Lucilla.

She made the statement very matter-of-factly, but Quentillian knew it to be none the less a condemnation.

"There was—is—no chance of making Adrian give it up?" Flora asked.

"None, I should think, at present. Hale is a man of

great personality, and Adrian is a good deal flattered, naturally enough, at being taken up by him. Of course he knows as well as you or I that it's the thing of all others to distress the Canon most. He's genuinely upset about it, in a way, but he struck me as being rather childishly bent on showing that he can strike out a line of his own."

"Poor, poor father! He has had so much to bear lately. Must he be told?" said Flora.

"Of course he must. But I don't think Owen is the person to do the telling. Adrian should do it himself."

"So I told him," Quentillian observed rather grimly. "The utmost I could get out of him was a very short note, that I am to give to the Canon when he knows the facts."

No comment followed the announcement of so slender an achievement, and they were sitting in silence when Canon Mordard came in.

He greeted Owen Quentillian affectionately, as he always did, but said quickly:

"I am afraid that you bear no very glad tidings, dear fellow. No matter. We will have our talk later. Let us forget grave subjects, and partake of 'the cup that cheers,' which I can see that Lucilla there has ready for us. What think you of this political crisis?"

In the ensuing conversation the Canon, if not merry, was at least gravely cheerful.

Afterwards he took Owen into the garden, his arm laid across the young man's shoulders in the fashion that he often adopted.

They remained out for a long while.

Lucilla did not see her father again until evening, when it was evident that a weight of unhappiness had descended upon him.

He read prayers as usual, and the servants left the room.

"One moment, my daughters. It is right that you should know the very grievous news I have learnt to-day. Adrian has definitely adopted a career which must cut him off from those of us who are living members of the Church. He has cast in his lot with an enemy of the Church—a man who makes his living, and has acquired a disgraceful notoriety, by attacking the Church. Your brother has been seduced into a friendship with this man—he is working for him, writing for his paper."

The Canon's voice broke.

"I am going up to seek him to-morrow and plead with him, but I have little hope. He does not answer the letters that I write with such yearning anxiety and love—I have lost my influence over him. If it is as I fear, then—'if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off.' My dear children, I ask you to join with me here and now in intercession for our erring one."

He broke down, and the tears ran down his face.

It was as though Adrian's defection cost him a double pang: that to his own fatherhood, and that to the ministry of the Church which he felt to be such a living reality.

III  
DAVID AND FLORA



**III****DAVID AND FLORA****(I)**

"It cannot be, my dear," the Canon repeated. So inexorable was his voice, in all its kindness, that his daughter Flora felt that it could not, indeed, be.

But it was Lucilla who had launched the "it" in question, and it was to Lucilla that the parental negative had been already addressed no less than three times.

"If I am thus patient with this strange persistence of yours, Lucilla," said the Canon, his voice deepening after a fashion which indicated not at all obscurely that he might not continue to be patient very much longer, "if I am thus patient, it is because I do you the justice to believe that it is sisterly affection for our poor Valeria and her little one, and not a mere restless desire for change, that has induced you to put forward this astonishing proposal. But consider the folly and selfishness of this scheme, my child. You propose to spend money—which we can ill afford, any of us—and sacrifice time and strength in a wild rush overseas, an insensate dash through an unknown country, in search of your sister's new home. No doubt you say to yourself, 'I am the winged messenger of the gods. I fly to take help and comfort. I will assist this new little life that is coming into the world.' You

picture to yourself a triumphal progress—a rapturous welcome—the acclamations of a New World. But you deceive yourself, Lucilla. You deceive yourself grossly."

Flora felt herself colouring as she bent over her needle-work. A display of violent emotion such as that into which Canon Mordard was now working himself by force of his own eloquence was always distasteful to her, and she felt a vicarious shame for Lucilla, convicted of such presumptuous flights of fancy.

Flora was astonished at the calm of her sister's reply, when it came.

"But I don't, father. I hadn't any idea of doing anything but travelling to Canada in the ordinary way, and being with Val when her new baby arrives. You know, it is dreadfully soon after her first one, and she really isn't——"

"Have a care, Lucilla! Who are you to question the time and seasons appointed by the All-seeing Wisdom for the bestowal of the infinite blessing of children?"

If Lucilla represented an infinite blessing to Canon Mordard, the fact was not over-evident at the moment. His brow was thunderous as he gazed at her.

"It is Valeria's own choice that has sent her into a far country. She might have been at our very gates, had she but willed it so."

"Well," said Lucilla reasonably, "I don't think if Val had been so near us as all that she would have written and begged one of us to come to her. It's just because she's out there, such a long way off, and with no one to help her, that she's frightened. Why, she may not even be able to get a servant."

"Poor child!" The Canon's voice softened. "The way of transgressors is hard. But two wrongs never yet

made a right, Lucilla. I recognise the generous impulse that moves you. If I spoke sharply just now, it was only from my intense wish to see you do justice to your own *really* noble character, my child. Believe me, your duty lies here, in the state to which it has pleased God to call you."

Lucilla's brows contracted slightly, after her shortsighted fashion, but it was not at all with an effect of vexation, but rather of some slight perplexity.

At last she said :

" Could Flora go ? "

Flora, startled, looked at her father. For a moment it occurred to her that perhaps he would be willing to spare her. Her heart leapt at the thought of seeing Val and Val's babies. A vista of new experience, of hitherto undreamed-of independence, startled even whilst it pleasantly excited her.

Then her father said : " My dear, of what are you thinking ? Your zealous desire to befriend one sister makes you strangely inconsiderate of the other. Flora is neither accustomed to responsibility, nor is she very robust in health. Certainly, were it a clear question of duty, one could put all that aside—but the call would have to be unmistakable, the leading beyond all question. I can see no such indications here."

Flora, quietly bent over her needlework once more, was ashamed of the realisation that she was disappointed.

Inwardly, she offered instant expiation for her rebellious moment, consciously addressing herself to the personal Divinity by whom, she had always been taught, every hair of her head was numbered.

The reflection came, in immediate consolation, that she was not without her spiritual glory by this very act of resignation.

"They also serve who only stand and wait," she thought.

The Canon had often quoted this to Flora, and indeed to any of his children who showed a desire for alien activities.

Flora might be said to have stood and waited for some time now. It occurred to her that if Lucilla went to Canada, responsibilities at home, other than passive ones, would become her own portion. The thought did not displease her. Flora, too, though far less consciously than Valeria, had sometimes glimpsed the sterility of her days.

"Lucilla, you know where to seek counsel, I believe," said Canon Mordard gravely. "I make all due allowances for your natural, loving impulse towards our poor Valeria—all due allowance. If your heart bleeds for her, how much more does not mine? But there are times when we must do violence to our natural feelings, and I believe that some such necessity is upon you now. Deny yourself, my daughter, and He will bless the sacrifice both to you and to our dear one far away."

"But who will look after her when her baby is born?" said Lucilla reflectively

"Lucilla, where is your trust?"

"Mostly in myself, I think," said Lucilla gently. "I really shouldn't feel it right not to go to Val's father. I hope you will forgive me." She spoke so gently, with so simple a note of sincere regret in her quiet voice, that the Canon, to Flora's perceptions, appeared to overlook the slightly blasphemous implication in the first words of her sentence.

"No man is more averse than myself from tampering with another's conscience," he said, with gravity and displeasure. "You are no longer a child, Lucilla, but have a care lest self-will should blind you. I have long since warned you of the danger of self-complacency. I lay no

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commands upon you, but I do most earnestly beg, my child, that you will submit your own judgment to a higher Tribunal than any earthly one before coming to any decision. Commune with your own heart, Lucilla, and be sure that self-seeking is not lurking under the guise of loving-kindness."

The Canon went out of the room and Flora and Lucilla were left together.

It was evident that Lucilla saw no urgent necessity for complying with her father's advice and communing with her own heart. She sat down at her writing-table, wrote for a few moments, and read over what she had written. Then she handed the half-sheet of notepaper to Flora.

It bore the announcement that a lady wishing shortly to travel to Canada would give her services on the journey in return for part passage.

"But you mean to go, then?"

"Oh yes."

"I thought father advised you to think it over?"

"I did think it over. Didn't you hear me say just now that I should think it wrong *not* to go to Val?"

"You are setting your own judgment up above father's," Flora pointed out coldly.

"I suppose so," Lucilla assented, seeming rather surprised, as though such an aspect of the case had not hitherto presented itself to her.

Flora softened.

"I can't help being glad you're going to be with poor Val when she wants you. And oh, Lucilla! You'll see little Georgie!"

"I know. I wish you could, too."

"So do I." She suddenly caught her breath. "Not that I should do what you're doing for a moment. I don't

see how you *can*, in direct opposition to father's advice."

"I'm sorry you see it like that," said Lucilla gently. "Now, Flora, as I may have to take my passage when I can get it, without much notice, I'd like to arrange one or two things with you. Would you like me to give Ethel a month's notice? She's a bad housemaid, but if you'd rather she stayed on till——"

"Lucilla, you talk as though it were all settled!"

"My dear, it *is* all settled. I told you that my mind was made up."

"You know that father will miss you most terribly? And, though he never speaks about it, he still grieves dreadfully over Adrian."

"I know. That hasn't really got anything to do with it, though, has it? If you keep on Ethel, you will have to make certain that she——"

"I can't talk about Ethel now, Lucilla. I'll do the best I can, if you really do go. Don't think I'm unkind, please. I do understand that it must be a great temptation, after poor Val's letter saying how much she wants you. I dare-say if she'd written like that to me," said Flora with an effort, "that I might have felt it dreadfully difficult to refuse to go to her."

Lucilla paused on her way to the door, and looked at her sister with friendly, reflective interest.

"But you would have refused?"

"Isn't it always safest," said Flora diffidently, and yet with the implacable certainty of rightness too; "isn't it always safest, when there's a choice—or what looks like a choice—to do whatever one likes least?"

"Lucilla!" called the Canon's voice.

She opened the door.

"No, I shouldn't call that a very good rule, myself.

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You'll let me know about Ethel as soon as you can, won't you? Her month's trial will be up next Wednesday."

"*Lucilla!*"

"I'm coming, father."

She went.

Flora let her work drop into her lap and folded her hands, allowing her thoughts to wander.

Could it be right to feel that the wrongdoing of another might prove to be one's own opportunity, come at last? She felt herself to have striven for so long with the endeavour to prove faithful in that which was least, all the time stifling resentment that no greater, more heroic task should be set her. She had always felt herself to be "little Flora" to her father, a child to be petted and sheltered, and in the minute introspection of a nightly examination of conscience she had frequently to reproach herself bitterly for an ungrateful longing to emerge sometimes from the shielded into the shielding. If Lucilla went away, their father would be alone, deserted except for Flora. David was in India. He wrote very seldom, and then never of coming home. Even his letters to Flora herself, always his favourite sister, were neither confidential nor frequent. Val was married, in Canada, and was claiming Lucilla's presence almost as a right. Adrian, in London, was the subject of daily intercession at St. Gwenllian, but it was known to all his children that the Canon would not again receive Adrian at home until he should have severed all connection with the atheist Hale.

How they had failed their father, all of them! Flora resolved passionately that she herself would never fail him. Prayer was the form of self-expression most natural to her, and she made ardent inward supplication that, if Lucilla were permitted to follow her own way, good might

come out of it, and she herself prove worthy of her sacred filial charge.

No such exaltation of spirit could be indulged in when Lucilla's decision had been openly accepted and her preparations begun.

She preserved all her usual even cheerfulness, and her conversation was rather more severely practical than before.

"Don't let the key of the store-room out of your own possession, Flossie, please. I'm sure both the maids are trustworthy, but it's no use breaking rules."

And :

"Remember *not* to order anything egg'y when Mr. Clover comes to a meal. He can't eat eggs."

"I mean to do my very best for everyone while you're away. But of course it won't be the same for father."

"I expect it will, if you're careful," said Lucilla kindly. "Don't let her put flavourings into everything, though—he can't bear them."

She seemed not at all preoccupied with less material considerations.

Even at the last she bade them good-bye without any of that aspect of remorse which Flora privately considered that she ought to have worn.

The Canon was very kind and forbearing, and said at the last moment :

"I hope and believe that you children understand what is meant by large-mindedness, and that I myself am the last man in the world to deny to each individual the right of an independent judgment. You are acting according to your lights, Lucilla, and I am willing—nay, eager—to believe in the sincerity of your motives. God bless you, my dearest one, and prosper your mission."

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Lucilla's farewell was affectionate, but not at all emotional. Flora was always undemonstrative by instinct, and it was only the Canon whose eyes were moist and whose voice shook.

Nevertheless, he turned to his remaining child after a moment and spoke very firmly.

" You may wonder, little Flora, that I have no reproach for Lucilla. She is leaving home against my advice, against my wishes. I believe that she deceives herself. But Lucilla means well—she means well. As we go through life, we learn to be very tolerant, very patient, to understand better what is meant by forgiveness 'unto seventy times seven.' "

He smiled at her.

" You and I must have some pleasant *tête-à-tête* evenings, Flora, now that we are left to bear one another company. I should like to rub up some of my old Italian lore. Shall we undertake some such task as Dante's *Paradiso* for our leisure time ? "

Flora assented, gratified.

Their days fell into a routine that suited her well, and although in her daily and nightly prayers Flora mentioned the names of both Adrian and Lucilla as candidates for Divine Mercy, she was not really conscious of any very earnest personal wish for the return of either to St. Gwenllian.

(II)

" *On the 18th November, suddenly, at Bombay, David, beloved elder son of Canon M orchard, of St. Gwenllian Vicarage. . . .*"

Owen Quentillian was away from Stear when he read the announcement with a strong sense of shock.

Why should David Morchard die?

He wrote to the Canon, and also, after a little hesitation, to Flora Morchard.

As he had expected, Flora's brief reply told him more than the Canon's numerous pages.

“MY DEAR OWEN,

“Thank you for your letter. We knew that you would be sorry, and would understand what this must be to my father and all of us. He is so brave and good, and everyone is kindness itself. We do not know anything at all except the bare fact, which was cabled from the regimental headquarters, and it will probably be another three weeks before letters can reach us. If you like, I will write again when they do. We shall want to see you very much when you get back to Stear. Father speaks of you so often, as though it would be a comfort to him to see you again.

“Yours sincerely,

“FLORA MORCHARD.”

The Canon's minute and legible handwriting covered several pages, and he, like Flora, but at far greater length, emphasised the kindness shown to him.

“My people here have shown feeling such as I dare hardly dwell upon, lest I overset altogether such composure as I may have won. Most of them, of course, remember our dear, dear fellow well, young though he was when he left us. But even those who never knew him speak such words as well-nigh break one's heart with gratitude and pity and tenderness. I tell myself that what ever *is*, must be best, and yet, Owen, the longing, that I can only trust may not be repining, to have had but one day—one hour—together, before this blow fell! It was so long since we had spoken

together ! And sometimes I reproached him for his long silences, for the absence of the details that one longed for, in his letters home. How could I—ah, how could I—I now ask myself sadly, who will receive no more letters from him again. How one learns to be gentle, as the years go on, and the day comes when each unloving word, each selfish thought, comes back to break one's heart ! And yet, Owen, who could have thought that *I* should be left, who have seen nigh on three-score years, and that strong, gallant lad taken in the very strength of his manhood ! Truly God's ways are not our ways. It does not bear writing of. We must have many long talks together when you are with us again. What a contrast to that first visit of yours, Owen, when our numbers were yet unbroken, save indeed for that first, great gap that only Lucilla and the dear lad who is gone could realise. At least, their mother has *one* with her !

" When you first came to us after the war, it was to give us direct news of our beloved boy. I seem to remember some merry gatherings then, with Lucilla and Flora 'making musik,' and Valeria all fun and brightness—I can write of her freely, dear Owen, can I not ; the old wound is healed now ?—and Adrian still the veriest boy, the light and sunshine of the house.

" You will find change and stillness and emptiness about the old place now. All are scattered, only Flora left in the empty nest. I can find no words to tell you what she has been, Owen. Friend, companion, daughter, comforter ! Of all my children, Flora and Lucilla are the two who have never failed me, never failed their own higher selves. And Lucilla, as you know, is away from us at present. Poor child ! What a punishment for her self-will in leaving us ! Flora and poor Clover have spared me in every possible way these days, and whilst I have them I can indeed never think myself wholly desolate. Letters will not reach us yet awhile from India, and one longs, and yet dreads, to receive them. There may be one from our poor lad himself—yet why do I call him ' poor,' when he is so far more blest

than we who are left? We can only conjecture that cholera or fever struck him down; he said nothing of sickness in his last letter, and whatever it was must have come upon him with fearful suddenness. One can only hope and pray that the Infinite Mercy allowed him time to meet the dread King of Terrors as one knows that he would have wished to do, but all, all is in other hands than ours.

"I have said nothing of your letter, dear Owen, my heart is too full. Let me answer it in person. Both Flora and I look for your return with eagerness and hope to persuade you to come to us at least for a day or two. You knew our loved one, and it is not so long since you and he met. How I envy you that meeting now! We have heard of it all in detail, I know, but you will have patience, and go over it all once more with us. The only thing that gives one courage to face the present (saving always that far-reaching Comfort which one *knows* to be there, but which poor humanity cannot always *feel*) is a mournful, tender lingering over the past. Nor must you fear that I always weep, dear Owen—there is often absolute rest and joy in dwelling on the past happiness that one knows to be only a shadow and faint foretaste of the joy that is to come.

"Bless you, dear fellow, and though I have said so little of thanks for all the sympathy and understanding in your dear letter, do not think of me as anything but profoundly touched and grateful.

"Sorrowfully and ever affectionately yours,  
"FENWICK MORCHARD."

Quentillian folded the letter and put it away.

He mentally visualised the silent and grief-stricken house, and his heart contracted strangely.

Valeria had gone, and would come back no more. Her heart was given to her new life, to her new country. Lucilla was with her. Adrian—the Adrian of the Canon's tender love and pride—had never been. David, who had

not wanted to come home, who had left "long intervals" between his scanty letters—David was dead.

There was only Flora left at St. Gwenllian.

He thought that he could see her, remote and restrained, either devoid of capability for human emotion, or regarding emotional display as rebellion against Heaven. He had never known which. Flora would move about the cold, silent house, and write the letters, and give the orders, and remember the sane, everyday things that must be done. She would be helped by the eager, anxious curate. Mr. Clover would remember things too, but he would not, like Flora, accomplish them in silence. He would suggest, and remind, and humbly and timidly deprecate his own efforts.

Quentillian could see the Canon too.

The Canon would spare himself nothing, but he would break down, with gusts of overwhelming sorrow and bitter remorse for his own want of resignation. He would write, and write, and write, in the lonely study, often blinded with tears, yet deriving his reallest comfort from the outward expression of his grief.

Quentillian could accept that, now, could realise it as an interpretation of a sincerity at least as complete as his own.

Within the fortnight he went to St. Gwenllian. It was all very much as he had pictured it to himself. Only Flora was a little, a very little, less remote than he had expected to find her. He thought that she dreaded the arrival of the letters from India, and feared their effect upon her father.

When the mail did arrive, the letters were brief and said that David M orchard had died in hospital of dysentery after three days' illness. The colonel of the regiment wrote

in praise of a career interrupted abruptly, and a parcel of effects was promised.

There was no more.

"Such letters have become so sadly common in the last few years," said the Canon wistfully. "How can one hope that in each individual case the writer will realise the yearning with which one looks for one personal touch—one word to show that all was well."

"Perhaps they will write from the hospital—the chaplain or the matron—when they send the things," Quentillian suggested.

He, too, was faintly disappointed and puzzled at the reticence of the letters.

Flora's face, set in the acquired composure of conscious resignation, told him nothing of her feelings.

But the day following brought him enlightenment from Flora herself.

They were sent out for a walk together.

"Take her for a walk, dear Owen," said the Canon solicitously. "Flora is pale and cold. She has shut herself up too much of late. Go, my child, I shall do very well, and can find only too much to occupy me. Enjoy the fresh air."

Flora made no protestations of inability to enjoy herself, nor any assumption of indispensability at home. It was the Canon, again, who suggested an errand to a distant cottage, and she acquiesced without comment.

It was a cold, grey day, with swiftly-moving masses of cloud and a chill in the wind. Flora and Owen walked quickly, and at first neither spoke. Then Flora said :

"How much, exactly, were you a friend of David's?" His own surprise made Quentillian realise afresh how very

seldom it was that Flora initiated any topic of a personal nature.

"We were not intimate," he replied.

"It was more the time that you spent with us here, when you were a little boy, than anything else, that established a relationship between you?"

"I suppose it was."

"I think you are very much interested in people, and Lucilla says that you are very observant," said Flora, smiling a little. "Would you mind telling me, quite dispassionately, if David was popular with other men—the officers in his regiment, for instance?"

Quentillian instinctively paid her the compliment of taking her at her word. He knew her to be sufficiently of a purist to say exactly what she meant, and too little of a sentimentalist to use words merely or effect.

He did not understand at what her questions aimed, but replied with unhesitating candour.

"I should say he was very popular. He was a good sportsman, and everyone liked him, although as far as I know he wasn't a man of intimate friendships. That type isn't."

"No. You see, Owen, there have been no letters from people who were in India with him, although you say he was popular. Only just those few lines from the colonel. And I was afraid before—and I'm afraid now—" She stopped.

"Of what?"

"That it wasn't dysentery, or anything like that. That they're keeping the truth from us out of pity, or to save some scandal. I—I can't get it out of my mind, Owen."

He heard her with something that was not altogether surprise. Subconsciously, he felt that his own uneasiness had been only dormant.

"Have you anything beyond intuition to go upon?"

"No."

"Why have you told me?"

He felt certain that she had not spoken merely in order to be reassured, nor in order to find relief. Speaking was no relief to Flora, so far as Owen could see.

"I want you to try and find out definitely."

"Yes. And supposing I do, supposing that what you fear is true . . ." He hesitated.

"That David took his own life?" said Flora, shuddering. "Then, don't you see, Owen, I shall have to tell father—or else to make it absolutely certain that no one will ever tell him."

"You can't," said Owen gently.

"But I must," she told him, with the same intensity. "He's had a great deal to bear already, and this would be worse than anything. Suicide is a mortal sin. Bodily separation one can resign oneself to—he is resigning himself, poor father, to separation from nearly all those whom he loves—but suicide would mean eternal separation. It would be worse than anything—the loss of David's soul."

"I see."

Quentillian did indeed see.

"Val, and Adrian, and David—they've all gone away from him," said Flora. "Only he knows there is another life, so much more real and enduring than this one, to which he looks. It means everything to him. If David did do—that—then the hope of meeting him again, in eternity, is gone, for father."

Quentillian felt the force of her low-spoken, anguished statement.

"You are taking it for granted that a suspicion—which, after all, rests on very little indeed—is true."

" You see, if I am to safeguard my father from this thing, I can't very well afford to wait and do nothing, just because there's quite a big chance that it isn't true at all. The chance that it *is* true may be infinitesimal—the hundredth chance, if you like—but it's that which I've got to think about, not the other. Optimism doesn't carry one far enough in preparing a line of defence."

" I agree with you."

" I don't think that either you or I are optimists, Owen," said Flora, faintly smiling.

" No."

" That's why I want you to help me. Can you make enquiries at any of the headquarter places in London where they might know something ? "

" I can try."

" Thank you very much," said Flora, as though his unenthusiastic assent closed the subject.

They went along the muddy road in silence.

It was from no sense that it was necessary to break it that Quentillian spoke again at last.

" Will Lucilla come back to England at once ? "

" I don't think so. She promised to stay till the spring. You know Val has another little boy ? I wish we could see them, but father will never really be happy about Val, I'm afraid. He forgave her long ago, but he doesn't forget things, ever."

" I don't consider that the Canon had anything to forgive," said Quentillian in tones of finality.

" But *he* does."

If Quentillian had expected a certain meed of recognition for the magnanimity of his point of view, he was not destined to be gratified. Flora spoke rather as one giving utterance to an obvious platitude.

“ Is Val happy ? ”

“ Very. She has exactly what she always really wanted. Sometimes they have a servant, but most of the time she does everything herself, and has occasional help. She is so happy with the two little boys, too, all her letters are about them, and about the house, and all they’re doing to improve it. She’s got the life that she was really meant for, and, after all, isn’t that what makes happiness ? ”

“ I suppose it is. She was meant for the primitive things, you think ? ”

“ Lucilla always said so. There is the cottage, Owen. Will you wait outside, or come in ? ”

“ I should like to come in with you.”

Life was inartistic, Quentillian reflected whimsically, while Flora delivered her father’s message to a middle-aged woman in an apron.

To accord with all literary conventions, there should have been a sick child in the cottage, and Flora’s tender soothing of its fretfulness should have proved a revelation of the unfulfilled maternal instinct within her.

But there was no sick child to provide a *clou* for Quentillian’s observations in psychology, and he was by no means assured of Flora’s powers of soothing. Rather would she urge the silence of resignation. He was convinced that never in her life had Flora M orchard been the centre of a pretty picture. That her personality seldom dominated any scene was not, he felt, from any conscious effacement, but from an innate and instinctive withdrawal of her forces to some unseen objective, to her infinitely worth while. He reflected with dismay on his own undertaking to make enquiries concerning the death of David M orchard. But he did not think that Flora, whatever the result of the enquiries, would be dismayed. Dismay

implied mental disarray, a quality of taken-abackness. Flora, as she would herself have told him, was strong in a strength not her own.

They walked back together almost in silence.

"Your little expedition did Flora good," the Canon told Quentillian that evening. "I am grateful to you, dear fellow, very grateful. Let us see something of you still, from Stear. It means a great deal to us both. There must not be 'good-bye' between us, save for the beautiful old meaning of the word, 'God by you.' God by you always, dear Owen."

Quentillian went to London, made no discoveries at all, and wrote to Flora.

She replied, thanking him, in the briefest of notes. A week later he received another letter from her.

"MY DEAR OWEN,

"The Indian mail came in yesterday, and brought me a letter from David, written a week before he died. He asked me to break it to my father that a Major Carey, in his regiment, was on his way home to take divorce proceedings against his wife, citing David as co-respondent. David asked me in the letter to do anything I could for Mrs. Carey, as she is by herself, with no relations in England. The case was to be undefended, and David had decided to leave the army and come to England as soon as possible to marry Mrs. Carey. I gather that he was very unhappy, especially at having to leave the regiment. I still do not know whether he found a dreadful solution to the whole question in taking his own life.

"Mrs. Carey has written to father, a strange note, which he showed me. She says nothing of the divorce proceedings, but only writes as a great friend of David's, imploring to be allowed to see us. Naturally, father is only too anxious to see her, and as she says that she is on her way

to Scotland at once, we are coming to London on the tenth so as to meet her.

"I have told father nothing whatever of David's letter to me. I cannot imagine that Mrs. Carey will want to make the facts known to him, but I shall be able to judge better when I have seen her, which I have decided to do, by myself, before the appointment with father.

"I can arrange this a great deal better with your help than without it, therefore will you come and see us on the evening we arrive—Thursday the tenth, at about six o'clock, Carrowby's Hotel ?

"Please destroy this letter.

"Yours sincerely,

"FLORA MORCHARD."

Quentillian, as he read Flora's unvarnished statements, felt a sensation as of being appalled.

He could not believe that Flora, fanatically single-minded as her determination to shield her father from the knowledge of the truth might be, had any conception of the difficulties that probably lay before her, and he asked himself also whether she had in any degree realised what the consequences must be to the Canon, far more than to herself, of a deception that should break down half-way.

His absolute conviction of Flora's inflexibility, and his own strong sense of the impertinence, in both the proper and the colloquial sense of the word, of offering unasked advice, were not enough to restrain him from the mental composition of several eloquent and elaborate expositions of opinion. But they sufficed to restrain him from transferring the eloquence on to a sheet of notepaper.

He went to Carrowby's Hotel to keep the appointment summarily made by Flora.

"You dear man!"

The Canon's exclamation of pleasure rang through the

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dingy hotel sitting-room in which Quentillian had found them. He always showed the same pleasure in seeing Owen, and Owen's old sense of inadequacy had insensibly given place to a rather remorseful gratitude.

"Is this the doing of Flora? She told me that she should notify you of our coming, but it is good to meet with a friend's face so early. Our stay is to be a very brief one. I have to return home for the Sunday. I cannot leave all in Clover's hands. Besides, I trust there will be no need. You know the errand on which we are come?"

"I told him in my letter," said Flora.

"This lady, this Mrs. Carey, had seen much of our dear fellow in India, and her letter is full of feeling—full of feeling. She had heard nothing of our tragedy until she landed in England. It seems that she had been in ill health for some time, she writes of complete prostration, and is on her way to Scotland now. So you will understand our hasty journey hither. Has it not indeed been with us, 'Ask and ye shall receive'? Flora here knows what my yearning has been for one word with those who knew him, who had been with him recently. And behold! it has been given unto me 'full measure, heaped up, pressed down and running over.'"

The Canon leant back. He looked very tired and old.

"Do you see her to-morrow morning, sir?"

"We go to her, Owen. She is good enough to receive us on Saturday morning, and I understand that she leaves that evening. To-morrow I have a conference in the afternoon, but the morning is our own."

He gazed wistfully at Owen.

"I had thought of a memorial window to the beloved David, and this is an opportunity which may not come

again. I have the name of a place to which I half thought of going, if it be not too trying for little Flora."

"Let me accompany you," said Quentillian.

It was evidently what the Canon wished.

"Will you, dear lad? I own that I should be glad of your arm—aye, and your presence. Flora is overwrought and overtired."

She did indeed look very ill, not at all to Quentillian's surprise.

"She has been taking too much thought for me, dear child," said the Canon—Quentillian could not help thinking with more truth than he realised. "I wish Flora to take some rest. Let the expedition to-morrow be yours and mine, Owen. Tell me, my daughter, what time am I free?"

"To-morrow morning, till twelve o'clock. Your conference is at two."

"Flora is my deputy secretary," said the Canon, smiling. "I trust it all to her, and her memory is unfailing. She is indeed my right hand."

"Will you come at ten o'clock to-morrow, Owen, and start from here?" said Flora abruptly.

He assented, determined to obtain an opportunity of speaking to her alone. If he was to assist Flora in a scheme of concealment against which he inwardly revolted strongly, he must at least know of what that scheme consisted. His indignation waxed in proportion to his anxiety, until Flora said to him with deliberation:

"Ought we to keep you any longer, Owen? I'll ring for the lift."

Her words took them both out of the room, and she closed the door after her.

"What is it you're doing?" said Quentillian, his urgency too great for a choice of words.

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She leant against the passage wall, white and rather breathless, but spoke low and very distinctly, as though to impress her facts upon him.

“Listen—I want you to be quite clear about it. The appointment with Mrs. Carey is for to-morrow—Friday morning. I’m going to her house. I’m certain from her letter that she’s not a woman to be trusted. I don’t know why she wants to see us, but I think it’s to tell us things—things about David. I shall know when I’ve seen her.”

“But your father thinks the appointment is for Saturday?”

“I told him it was. I wrote the letter to arrange it.”

“And how are you to prevent his going there on Saturday?”

“She leaves for Scotland on Friday night.”

“You know that for certain?”

“Of course I do, Owen. One doesn’t leave these things to chance. But I shall telephone on Saturday and find out if she’s really left.”

“I still don’t understand altogether. How can you explain to the Canon that this lady isn’t there, when he goes by appointment to see her?”

“I shall have made a mistake. I’m keeping the engagements written down for him. And I shall have written down this engagement for Saturday instead of for Friday. He will go exactly one day too late.”

“Flora, you can’t do it.”

She lifted tired eyes to his face, overwrought to the point of hysteria.

“Don’t waste time. Only tell me if I can count on you. All I want you to do is to keep father out with you to-morrow morning. I shall be at Mrs. Carey’s at half-past ten and I promise to be back here before one o’clock.”

"Suppose this lady is not what you think her, and you find that she will be—discreet—is your father to be disappointed of his hopes of seeing her?"

"I may be able to arrange something. Perhaps she'd put off going to Scotland, and see him on Saturday after all. It would be all right then, wouldn't it? Or I might even be able to tell her the whole thing," said Flora wistfully. "It isn't very likely, though."

He did not think that it was.

"You see, you didn't see her original letter, and I did. It was the letter of a very emotional person. She might say almost anything, I imagine, and—well, there's a good deal that mustn't be said, isn't there?"

It was incontrovertible, but Quentilian said roughly:

"I detest manœuvring, it's utterly unworthy of you. All this juggling with dates and letters—"

"It's no use doing things by halves," said Flora. "Yes or no, Owen, are you going to back me up if necessary?"

"If I say no, will it deter you from going through with this insane performance?"

"Of course it won't." She actually smiled. "What would be the sense of making up one's mind if it's to be unmade again just because one's friends don't agree with one?"

"Very well." He shrugged his shoulders as one in desperation.

She evidently accepted it as the assent, however ungracious, that he meant it to be.

"Thank you very much," said Flora with brief finality.

## (iii)

Flora followed Mrs. Carey's maid upstairs, feeling as though the beating of her heart were causing each breath she drew to crowd thickly upon the next one.

Mrs. Carey's house—she supposed it was Mrs. Carey's house—was a very tiny one indeed, and looked tinier by reason of the number of pictures, draperies, and flowers that covered every available corner of the steep staircase and the small landing.

The drawing-room was small, too, and so dark that the maid turned on the rose-shaded electric lights as she ushered Flora into the empty room.

"Mrs. Carey isn't down yet. I'll tell her you're here, m'm."

"Mrs. Carey is expecting me. Please say that it is Miss Morschard."

The maid went away.

"Unpunctual," reflected Flora. "She said half-past ten."

She gazed round the room, which confirmed the impression of Mrs. Carey's personality that Flora had already received from her pale mauve notepaper, her methods of expressing herself in writing, and that which she knew of her relations with David Morschard.

Nearly everything in the room was rose-colour, except the walls, which were grey and laden with sketches, brackets, and a shelf on which stood innumerable framed and unframed photographs, nearly all of them signed.

A minute writing-table, set cornerways, overflowed with papers and more photographs, including one that Flora

recognised instantly, although it had never been sent to St. Gwenlian.

The chair in front of the table supported a number of illustrated papers.

"Untidy," was Flora's next verdict.

She had resolutely closed the avenues of her mind to emotion and speculation alike. The habits of observation, which she mentioned in private spiritual consultation with her father as her own tendency towards a lack of charity, she knew subconsciously to possess a steadyng effect.

A quantity of cigarette ash in a small receptacle, presumably placed there on the previous evening, and a general atmosphere of unopened windows, did not serve to modify Flora's already unenthusiastic judgments.

Neither did Mrs. Carey's delay in making her appearance.

When she at last came in, it was difficult to see what could possibly have delayed her, since she had apparently only stepped out of bed into a wadded silk kimono, a lace boudoir cap, and fur-bordered bedroom slippers.

She looked younger than Flora had expected her to be, and her little pallid face was pretty enough, with violet semi-circles under big, light blue eyes, and a general air of fragility. Although nearly as tall as Flora herself, she was slight enough to produce an effect of daintiness, the adjective that Flora immediately felt certain would appeal to her most.

A short, thick plait of fair hair fell over her shoulder, and a certain babyish plaintiveness of utterance made Flora think of Olga Duffle.

"I'm sure you're David's sister," said Mrs. Carey, to which proof of intuition her visitor offered no reply, thinking the fact sufficiently self-evident.

"Oh, do sit down. You must forgive me coming in

like this, but I'm not strong, and I arrived worn out after an awful voyage—and then to get this news ! Do you smoke ? ”

“ No, thank you.”

“ Do you mind if I do ? I smoke too much, but my nerves are in an awful state. A doctor friend of mine—the dearest thing—made me promise faithfully never to inhale, but I'm afraid I do. It was the ship's doctor, on the way home, as a matter of fact. There were one or two nice men on board, but the women were dreadful. Miss M orchard, I should think other women generally confide in you, don't they, and like you most awfully ? Now, I'm *not* enormously popular with other women. I don't mean that I haven't got women friends, devoted ones, who'd do anything in the world for me, but most of my very best pals have been men. It's funny, isn't it ? Your brother was one of my *dearest* friends.”

The blue eyes looked warily at Flora.

“ That's why I felt I had to see you—and oh ! you are so like him ! It's hardly like talking to a stranger at all ! ”

It certainly was not, Flora reflected.

“ I feel I'm so dreadfully in the dark—I know nothing. Only the awful, awful fact. When I got the cable—it was cabled to me by a dear friend at Government House—when I read it, I simply didn't believe it. I said, ' It can't be true.' But it was.”

Flora did not feel it incumbent upon her to reply.

“ When your father got my letter, I daresay he was astonished, but I'm frightfully impulsive, Miss M orchard, and I felt I *must* know more or I should go mad. That's why I begged you to let me see you. I'm a thoroughly unconventional woman, as you may perhaps have guessed, and I always act on impulse.”

Flora looked at the frightened, furtive little face, and wondered what purpose and what concealment lay behind the flood of words.

"I'm going to be perfectly frank with you, because I feel I can trust you. May I call you Flora? My name is Maisie—a silly little name, isn't it, but my friends all say it suits me. I don't know why. Tell me, did David write to you about me? He said he was going to, but it was such a—such a short time before—"

Mrs. Carey's tongue moistened her lips as though they were dry.

"I don't know whether you've ever lived abroad, but, if you haven't, you don't know what the East is like for people who have to live there. There's a frightful amount of slander and gossip going on, and people put a wicked construction on all sorts of innocent things. It's awful. It used to make me simply miserable. You see, live and let live has always been my motto. I like to go my own way and have my own friends, and not do any harm to anybody, but simply be happy in my own little way. After all, it's what God meant for all of us, isn't it? But in India one can't do that. My dear, you wouldn't believe what it's like. I went out when I was awfully young—I was married at twenty—and I know for a fact that the most beastly things have been said about me. You see, I feel I can tell you this quite frankly, Flora, because of your being David's favourite sister. I know you'll understand, and that I can trust you."

Again that furtive, anxious glance was shot at her from under Mrs. Carey's long lashes.

"I've had heaps of men friends, of course—especially in the regiment. I'm going to be *perfectly* honest with you, and own up that one or two of them got rather silly,

and fancied themselves in love with me. That wasn't my fault, was it? I just wanted to be friends, you know. A nice woman can do such a lot for young men. I couldn't help it—possibly—if they went and fancied themselves in love with me. Now, could I? But would you believe it, people—it was mostly women, I must say, and some of them actually called themselves my friends—went and invented the most disgusting lies about me. Out of jealousy, you know. I was a good ten years younger than any of them, as it happened, and you'd have thought the colonel's wife, or anyone like that, might have wanted to mother me a little bit. (I lost my own mother when I was only fourteen, and had a rotten time at home.) But instead of that, my dear, *instead* of that, they simply spread these filthy stories about me and all my best friends. However, I don't want to go into all that. It was soon after I first went out, and of course nobody who really knew me believed for an instant that there was anything in it. They heard something about it at Government House, you know, and the Governor was simply furious, I believe. My friend in the secretariat told me about it. The Governor said that Mrs. Carey was the only real lady in the place, as well as being the prettiest woman in India. Of course, that may have been nonsense, because I happen to know that he did like me most awfully—personally, I mean—but I know I was most awfully touched at his taking up the cudgels for me like that. It showed what the people who really *mattered* thought of me, didn't it, and, after all, the Governor of a place does represent the King, doesn't he?"

"Yes," said Flora.

It was the first appeal to which she had felt able to give any assent.

"You said that *so* like David!" cried Mrs. Carey.

clasping her hands together. "We were the greatest friends, and he used to come to me about everything. I used to tell him to marry. . . ."

Another pause, and another look.

"I always want my young men friends to marry. That just shows, doesn't it, what nonsense it is for anyone to talk as though there were anything wrong about it? I don't know whether your brother ever hinted anything to you in his letters about any horrid gossip. Between ourselves, he used to get angry, I know, at the things that were sometimes said, and of course he knew that I wasn't—well, very happy. You're not married, I know, so perhaps you won't understand what it means to a woman, especially a very sensitive one, which I am, to have a husband who is jealous. I'm not blaming Fred exactly; I suppose he can't help it, and he was madly in love with me when we married. Of course, I was much too young and ignorant of life to marry, but I had an awfully unhappy home, and if it hadn't been Fred it would have been somebody else—men were always pestering me, somehow. Besides, people made mischief between us. How people can be wicked enough to come between husband and wife I can't think! I've been through hell once or twice in my life, I can tell you!"

Looking at the fear and the craftiness and the sensuality written on Maisie Carey's small, ravaged face, Flora could believe it without difficulty.

"I don't really know why I'm telling you all this, exactly. It's not like me. I'm terribly reserved, really. But you've got such an awfully nice face, somehow, and you're David's sister. I can't tell you how fond I was of David—we were just tremendous chums. It upset me awfully, that he should die in that sudden way."

She began to cry in a convulsive, spasmodic way.

Flora still remained silent.

"I wish you'd tell me if he ever wrote anything to you about me," sobbed Mrs. Carey.

In the midst of her tears, which seemed to be really beyond her own control, Flora caught a glimpse as of a terrible anxiety. She suddenly knew that in the answer to that last sobbed-out question lay, for Mrs. Carey, the crux of their interview.

"He did write," said Flora. "But what he wrote is safe with me. It will never go any further."

The figure in the gay silk kimono seemed to cower further back into the armchair, but there was no self-betraying exclamation.

"I suppose he told you about Fred and me?"

"And about himself, too," said Flora.

"Men are all alike! Why did he want to tell you?"

"So that I could tell my father and sister. David was afraid of father."

"Your father knows?" This time the note of alarm was undisguised.

"No. The letter was only found and posted after the ones that told us of David's death. And I have told my father nothing."

Mrs. Carey broke into vehement, hysterical speech.

"There's nothing to tell! You people at home make such mountains out of molehills. I swear to you that there was nothing between us, that I never——"

Flora interrupted her.

"He told me everything," she repeated. "He told me that the case would be undefended, and that he was coming home to marry you. So you see, I know."

"You! What can you, who've never married, never

seen anything of life, know of things? You see evil where none exists—you're like all these good and holy people . . . intolerant! . . ." Tears poured unchecked down her face, making streaks across the white powder. " You don't even *begin* to know what I've gone through. My husband is a beast—a *beast*! You don't know what that means."

She flung herself backwards, almost prone, and wept hysterically.

" What are you going to do? " said Flora.

" Kill myself! "

The rhetorical answer came almost automatically.

Flora waited for a moment, and then said very gently:

" As you say, I don't know anything about these things, but perhaps you would tell me what you want. We might think of some way of making things better. And you can see for yourself that your secret—and David's—is safe with me. I've deceived my father, sooner than let him guess. I don't think he need ever know, now."

" Why don't you want him to know? " said Mrs. Carey, with sudden curiosity that seemed to check her crying.

" It would make him very unhappy. He was proud of David, and he thinks that David had a career before him. Perhaps you've read in books," said Flora, speaking as though to a child, " about people thinking death is better than dishonour. Well, my father is like that."

" He's a parson, isn't he? "

" Yes."

Mrs. Carey shrugged her shoulders.

" Where is your husband now? " Flora enquired. She felt that she could ask this woman questions without fear of rebuff, but she thought that it would be for her to disentangle the true from the false in Mrs. Carey's replies.

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"Fred's in Scotland. He's staying with his mother. She's a beastly old woman and I hate her. If she'd been a decent sort, you'd think she'd have used her influence to put things right between us—now wouldn't you? But she's never let Fred alone ever since we married. Always telling him tales about me, and saying I'm extravagant, and a flirt, and wanting to know why I've never had a baby. It's not my fault if I've got rotten health—now is it? I've always been delicate. I'm sure I only wish I had got a child. It might have made Fred nicer to me, and I should have had something to care for."

She began to cry again.

"I'm sure I don't know why I'm telling you all this. Perhaps you think I'm mad."

"I'm dreadfully sorry for you," said Flora truthfully.

"You're a dear." Mrs. Carey dropped the hostility out of her voice abruptly. "No one knows what I've gone through. And now about David—it's simply awful!"

"Did you really mean to marry David, after your divorce?"

"I'd better tell you the whole story, I suppose," said Mrs. Carey. She dried her eyes, and her voice insensibly hardened from self-pity into tones of satisfaction.

"I suppose I've always been attractive to men. I can't help it, after all. And I daresay I've played the fool in my time—in fact I don't deny it. But David and I were simply tremendous friends, to begin with. He was frightfully sorry for me, too. Everybody knew that Fred was simply hateful to me, and made a scene if I so much as went out riding with another man. He quite liked your brother, though, at first—I will say that for him. We used to have him to dinner pretty often, and one of the subalterns to make a fourth, and play bridge. Well, I never guessed

that your brother did more than just like me as a great friend, as heaps of men did—how could I? I used to advise him to marry, often and often. Some nice girl at home, who'd come out and look after him. Those boys all drink more than is good for them out there, if they've no wife to look after them. And David used to talk nonsense about having no use for girls, and having met his ideal too late, but of course I never took it seriously. Heaps of men say things like that to one, now don't they? We used to go out riding together a good deal, and of course I danced with him. (That's another of the ways in which Fred is so frightfully selfish. He can't dance himself, so he hates me to.)

"Then people began to say the usual horrid things. The women out there are all cats—and besides, a good many of them wanted David for themselves. I didn't take any notice, I think it's so much more dignified not to, don't you? As I said to the colonel's wife, when she had the impertinence to speak to me about it, I never *have* taken any notice of gossip, and I'm not going to begin now. I simply go my own way, and let people say what they choose. It doesn't matter to me if they've got horrible minds. It's themselves that are hurt by it, I always think, not me. But I think women are much braver and more unconventional than men, don't you? David minded ever so much more than I did, when he found people were talking about us. Well, things were going from bad to worse between Fred and me, and one night he was so perfectly hateful to me that I got frightened. He was—not drunk, but not altogether sober. And I ran into the compound and down the road to David's bungalow. He shared it with another man, but the other man was away shooting. You see, I was so frightened and upset that I didn't know what I

was doing, and I just felt I must go to someone who'd take care of me."

Mrs. Carey swallowed, as though something in her throat were hurting her, and lit another cigarette with a hand that trembled.

"It was a frightfully imprudent thing to do, I suppose, but I've never pretended to be a particularly prudent woman. I dare say I should have been much happier if I'd been less impulsive, all my life ; but after all, one can't change one's nature, can one ? Besides, I was nearly out of my mind. Fred came to find me next morning. I was far too miserable and terrified to go back to him that night. We had scene after scene, after that, and he threatened me with divorce proceedings."

She glanced at her motionless auditor.

"I may have been a careless fool, and I'll go as far as to say that I've flirted with other men, but it was wicked of Fred to think of such a thing as divorce—to ruin my reputation and spoil David's career."

"Why was the case to be undefended?" said Flora steadily.

"Why—why, don't you see, when it all came to a crisis, I told David how utterly wretched my whole life was, and how I couldn't bear it and should kill myself, and we had to talk things over, and see what could be done with Fred, who was like a madman. And then it all came out—I mean David said I was the only woman he could ever care for, and if I was free wouldn't I marry him, and let him try to make up to me for everything."

"Why was the case to be undefended?"

"It would make less of a scandal if it was all done quietly. I—I don't feel I could face the other."

In the truth of that last assertion Flora could believe absolutely.

"I think I know the rest," she said. "David was going to send in his papers and come home to England as soon as possible after you and Major Carey, and you'd promised to marry him when the decree had been made absolute."

"How do you know those legal terms?" said Mrs. Carey, pouting like a child that is trying to show displeasure.

Flora did not pursue the irrelevance. She was following a chain of thought in her own mind.

"David *was* in love with this woman. Otherwise he wouldn't have written and asked me to do anything I could for her. As for leaving the case undefended—well, they probably hadn't got a defence to put up. He meant to marry her—probably wanted to marry her. Besides, he'd have felt that he owed it to her. And though he was afraid of father, and very unhappy about sending in his papers, and though he may have had glimpses of what she really is—David wasn't the sort to let her down. *He didn't kill himself.*"

The certainty came to Flora with a rush of relief so profound that she could almost have thanked little Mrs. Carey for unwittingly bringing it to her.

It was characteristic of her that, instead, she glanced at her watch and said :

"I can only stay another twenty minutes, and we shall probably not meet again. Are you going to Scotland to-night?"

"Indeed I am. Fred is there now, at his mother's, telling her all sorts of horrible things about me, I suppose. They've both written to me."

"What is your husband going to do?"

"I don't know." She began to cry again. "His mother, for once in her life, wants to patch things up

between us. She's one of your religious people, and she thinks divorce is awful."

"I don't know whether a divorce is still possible, now that David—"

Mrs. Carey broke into a sort of howl that, in its reminiscence of a beaten animal, made Flora feel sick.

"That's just it—Fred *is* a beast! He thinks there were other people—other men—as well."

"Oh," said Flora, and shuddered violently.

"You've been rather a dear, so I don't mind telling you that your brother is out of it now, whatever happens. Oh, I don't know what'll happen. I never cared for anybody like I did for David—never. I was ready to go through anything for him, and we could have started afresh somewhere, and no one would have thought anything of it. People aren't so narrow-minded as they used to be. He's the only man I've ever loved!"

Flora felt no inclination to point out to the unhappy woman the inconsistency of her various statements.

She even found it easy enough to believe that Maisie Carey for the moment thought herself to be speaking the truth when she said that David was the only man she had ever loved.

"I'm sorry for you," she said gently. "And I'm grateful to you, because you've taken a great weight off my mind. My brother asked me to do anything I could for you. Is there anything?"

"I don't know what *you* could do, I'm sure. It isn't even as though you were married. Not that you haven't been sweet to me, listening like this. You do believe in me, don't you? Even if you hear beastly stories about me, ever, you'll know they aren't true, won't you?"

She put out a hand that still trembled, to Flora, but she

went on speaking rapidly, as though not daring to wait for an assent that might not come.

" You're awfully like David, in some ways, you know. It's been a comfort to see you. Don't tell your father about my troubles. Just say I was a friend of David's, you know. I'm glad he didn't come with you. I hate parsons, if you'll excuse me for saying so, and I'm so frightfully nervous and upset that I might have said anything. I wish you could have seen Fred—he always says I haven't got any decent women friends. Perhaps you could have made him give me another chance."

" Don't you think he will ? "

" How do I know ? He's written me a horrid letter, and pages and pages of cant from my mother-in-law. I believe if I promised to live at their hateful place, right away in Scotland, and keep within my allowance, and never have any fun at all, Fred would chuck the army and manage the estate for his mother. Can you see me in thick boots and a billy-cock hat, trudging up and down those hills to go and carry tracts to some wretched old woman in a cottage ? "

She laughed melodramatically.

" No," said Flora, " I can't see you doing that. But I shouldn't think you'd have to. Couldn't you come here for part of the year ? "

" I suppose I could. I don't know. Fred got this house to please me, when we were first married. He'd have done anything for me then ! I little knew what a life he was going to lead me later on ! "

Flora rose.

" I've got to go. I will burn the letter that David wrote me about you. Only one person knows what was in it besides myself, and he will never repeat it."

"Was that your father?"

"No, oh no! My father *mustn't* know, ever."

Flora paused for a moment, then judged that it would be useless to make any appeal to Mrs. Carey's discretion. For her own sake, she might keep silence as to her relationship with David Morchard, and a fresh emotional disturbance would eventually displace the episode—to her, it could be no more—from her mind.

Mrs. Carey looked at her curiously.

"Of course, I remember you told me that your father didn't know. Then are you engaged?"

"No," said Flora, colouring slightly.

"All men are beasts—you're quite right to have nothing to do with them. I've had such a rotten time, what with Fred's jealousy, and other men never letting me alone, that I sometimes wish I'd stayed an old maid, like you," said Mrs. Carey.

Flora recognised the impulse that sought to inflict a scratch where Mrs. Carey's self-revelation had left her vanity disturbed with the instinctive fear that she had not been taken at her own valuation.

She said good-bye to her.

"I'll let you know what happens," Mrs. Carey promised. "I feel you really *do* care, you know. I shall think of you when I'm taking that horrid journey to-night all the way to Scotland. Perhaps I really will settle down there, if Fred is willing to make it up, and if he lets me have a decent allowance, and part of the year over here."

She no longer looked desperate, and she bent over the banisters and waved to Flora with the little handkerchief that was still drenched by the tears she had been shedding.

Flora did not suppose that she should ever hear from

her. Impressions made upon Mrs. Carey seemed to be transient affairs.

She was conscious of nothing so much as of extreme physical fatigue and the intense relief of her new certainty that David had not, after all, sought the last desperate remedy. She could be certain of that now.

"Perhaps Owen won't understand why I'm so positive of that now," she reflected. "But after all, I knew David. She counted on him, and he'd promised to marry her. David would never have failed her deliberately—it wasn't in him. And he was taken away from committing a frightful sin. Besides, who knows how much he repented, poor boy?"

Within a few yards of the hotel Flora met Quentillian.

He turned and accompanied her to the door.

"David didn't take his own life, Owen. It was what they said—he must have been taken ill suddenly."

"You know for certain?"

"For certain."

He told her that he understood her relief, but his next words were:

"And do you still think you were right about going alone to this woman?"

"Whether I was right or not, I'm thankful I did. She would have broken my father's heart. She was a sort of emotion-monger. She'd have spared him nothing."

"She spared you nothing, then, Flora?"

"It's different for me. I would do anything in the world for my father's sake. That's my only excuse, possibly, for deceiving him."

"Do you want excuses?"

"No, I don't. You're right," she said gravely. "I've planned it all deliberately, and I've got to see it through."

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"I think you're wrong, all along the line, and I want to talk it over with you. It will be a bitter disappointment to the Canon to be told that he has missed seeing Mrs. Carey."

"Yes."

"But you're going to leave it at that?"

"Yes, more than ever. Owen, when do you go to Stear?"

"As soon as possible."

"Then could you travel down with us to-morrow? We go by the three o'clock train. I think it may do him good to have you, and, you see, he'll be thinking that the whole expedition has been a failure. It will be easier for both of us if you're there."

"Very well, I'll come."

They parted, and Flora went to seek her father.

(IV)

Except from a certain curiosity, it could not be said that Quentillian looked forward to an agreeable journey.

By the time that he joined Canon Mordard and his daughter at the railway station, he was beginning to feel as though the whole of the involved deception perpetrated with such a conviction of righteousness by Flora must have been a figment of imagination. One glance at the Canon's sombre and pallid face dispelled the illusion.

Flora looked pallid also, but her expression was one of rapt intensity, as though only her own strange vision, that Quentillian felt to be so singularly perverted, were before her. She had, undeniably, shielded her father from

knowledge that must have appalled him, and in that security remained calm.

The Canon, out of his lesser awareness, had not, however, remained calm at all.

"I have been angry, Owen," he admitted, as they paced the platform together at the Canon's own invitation. "My disappointment has been very bitter. This lady, this Mrs. Carey, the friend of my dear boy David, left for Scotland last night. I went to her house this morning, only to find her gone. Flora, whom I trusted, had made a mistake of incredible carelessness. I could not have believed it, in a matter which *must* touch us all so nearly, which lay so close to my own heart. Poor child, she has been highly tried of late, and I have thought her looking ill. I should not have trusted to her accuracy. Lucilla, who has been my right hand, my secretary ever since her childhood, could never have failed me thus. I forgot that her sister was younger, unaccustomed to the task, less to be relied upon. But it has been a cruel disappointment, and I vented my first grief upon the culprit. Is there *no* stage of the journey, Owen, when one can see the undisciplined impulse driven underfoot, the hasty word bridled? I, who have striven all my life, I have again shown anger and violence—to my own child!"

The Canon's peculiar predilection for making an amateur confessor of Quentillian was by force of repetition ceasing to seem anything but natural.

Quentillian said: "Flora looks overwrought, sir," and inwardly hoped that the train would arrive shortly.

"Aye, poor Flora! She was David's especial favourite, his best correspondent. This stroke has fallen heavily upon Flora, Owen. And I, who should have made all allowance, I turned against her! In my sharp dis-

appointment I uttered those strong expressions that come back to one, when the moment's passion has cooled, as they must have sounded to the unhappy sinner by whom they were provoked."

It was the same piteous round of self-reproach, remorse, and profound depression to which Owen had so frequently listened. He hoped that he might be of some assistance, however incomprehensibly to himself, in listening yet once again.

"I have written to Mrs. Carey. She must indeed have thought my behaviour strange, ungrateful, unnatural even. That matters little enough, yet it adds its feather-weight to the burden—its feather-weight to the burden. That I should have appeared careless, indifferent, where news of David was concerned! I, who would have given my heart's blood for one hour's intercourse with him since he left us for the last time! Ah well, it does not bear dwelling upon."

Nevertheless, the Canon dwelt upon it until it became necessary to rejoin Flora and enter the train.

During the journey he remained silent, with a profound and unhappy silence. His manner towards his daughter was peculiarly gentle and melancholy.

Presently he leant back in the corner, the sad lines of his face relaxing, and slept.

Flora spoke to Quentillian in a low voice.

"I'm so glad he's asleep. Last night I heard him walking up and down his room for such a long while."

"He is very much distressed," said Quentillian severely.

"I know." She acquiesced apathetically in the truth of the statement.

"Do you know that he has written to Mrs. Carey?"

"Yes."

" How are you going to prevent her replying and exposing the fact that you have seen her ? "

Flora whitened perceptibly, but she answered him with sudden spirit.

" You have no right to question me, Owen, or to demand explanations from me in that tone."

" I have this right : that you have made me a passive partner in your extraordinary schemes."

Owen, too, was conscious of a rising anger.

" I feel like a traitor to your father, Flora. What are you going to do next ? "

" I am going to see it through," said Flora doggedly. " At least you will admit that to do a thing like this by halves is a great deal worse than useless. I have saved my father from what must have broken his heart."

" You have done evil that good may come," he quoted grimly.

" If you like to put it so." Flora was inexorable.

" He has suffered too much already."

" You mock your own God," said Quentillian, with sudden, low vehemence. " You profess to believe in Him, to trust Him, and yet you deceive and manœuvre and plot sooner than leave your father to His dealings. I have small belief in a personal God, Flora, but I can see no justification in endeavouring madly to stand between another soul and Life."

She gazed at him piteously.

" Do you think I am not unhappy—that I have not been torn in two ? He was angry, Owen, when he thought I had made a mistake about the appointment, and oh, the relief of it ! I should have welcomed it if he had hit me—I deserved it all, and far more besides. If I am doing wrong, I am suffering for it."

Quentillian, looking at her haggard, tragic face, felt sure that she spoke literal truth.

"When does Lucilla come home?" he suddenly asked.

"I don't know. Soon, I hope."

Quentillian hoped so too. It seemed to him that only Lucilla's normality could adjust to any sort of balance the mental atmosphere of St. Gwenllian.

Flora gazed at her father.

"Think what it would have been to him to know, now, that David had sinned, even that he contemplated going through the form of marriage, with that poor thing! The world's standards of honour are not those of my father."

"Nor yours either," Quentillian had almost said, but he checked the cheap retort as it rose.

An impulse made him say instead :

"Promise me at least, Flora, that if this becomes too much for you, if it all breaks down, you will let me share it with you. You owe it to me, I think, having let me be partly responsible. Will you promise?"

"You are very good," said Flora, her mouth quivering for the first time. "But I don't mean to fail."

It was evident enough that her whole being was strung up to the accomplishment of her purpose, and that she was incapable of seeing beyond it.

Quentillian, at his own station, parted from Canon Morchard and his daughter with the direst forebodings. Insensibly, he, too, had almost come to feel that anxious preoccupation with the Canon's peace of mind that exercised the Canon's daughters.

Within a fortnight of his return he went over to St. Gwenllian, and found there no trace of catastrophe such as he had half expected, but the usual atmosphere of calm melancholy.

He had no conversation with Flora, but she told him briefly that there would be no correspondence between her father and Mrs. Carey, and Quentillian was left to surmise by what peculiar methods Flora had achieved her ends.

On the whole, he preferred not to dwell upon the subject. He had a certain unwilling respect for Flora, even if none for her casuistries, and he had no wish to dwell either upon her astonishing machinations or his own complicity.

(v)

In the spring, Lucilla came back to St. Gwenllian.

The first time that Owen saw her was in the presence of the Canon.

In his relief at her return, Canon Mordard had evidently forgotten that he had thought it undutiful of her to go.

"You see I have my right hand once more," he said fondly. "Owen here can tell you that you have been sadly missed, my daughter. Little Flora did her best, but she is not my housekeeper, my experienced secretary. Neither she nor our poor Valeria can equal Lucilla there."

Quentillian took his advantage and asked Lucilla for news of Valeria. The Canon, habitually, seemed only too much inclined to view any mention of Valeria and her husband as a rank indecency in the presence of her quondam betrothed.

"Val is very well and very busy," said Lucilla. "George is doing very well, on the whole, though it's a struggle, but the land there is wonderful. I should like to show you the photographs of their little farm, and the children."

"Lucilla is our photographer," said the Canon forbearingly, as though in extenuation of what Quentillian felt certain that he regarded as Lucilla's indiscretion.

Not for the first time Quentillian suspected that Lucilla was the only one of the Canon's children able to contemplate the Canon by the light of a sense of humour that detracted not at all from her affection and respect.

"They are not thinking of a visit to England, I suppose?"

"No. Expense is a consideration, and there are the children."

"My grandsons!" said the Canon. "I should like a sight of my grandsons, but there could not be unalloyed joy in the meeting. Nay, I ask myself sometimes if there can be any unalloyed joy here below. Are not the warp and woof intermingled even in the nearest and dearest relationships? And the manner of poor Valeria's leaving home was such as to make one's heart ache, both for her and with her."

"But enough of reminiscences, my children. I am in no mood for them to-night. I wish to rest, and perhaps read. You may some of you remember a very favourite old story of mine," said Canon Mordard genially. "That of the famous saying, 'We are none of us infallible, *not even the youngest.*'"

This humorous pronouncement, however historical, seldom amuses the juniors of its *raconteur*, and Flora and Lucilla only accorded to it the most perfunctory of smiles. Owen Quentillian remained entirely grave.

"No one has more admiration than myself for the quality of infallibility," the Canon continued humorously "—always provided that it is not that which is claimed by the Pope of Rome—but I must confess that I am not

amongst those who take the modern craze for youthful intellectuals very seriously. This being so, dear Owen, you will forgive me in that I have not yet read anything of yours. To-night I have a free hour—a rare treat—and I am going to rectify the omission. Will you read aloud to us of your work, or is that too much to ask?"

It was indeed too much to ask, Owen felt.

He could have read his own work aloud with comparative complacency to any critic capable of taking it seriously, but to Canon Mordard, the slight, cynical epigrams, the terse, essentially unsentimental rationalism of Owen's views upon God and man, must come either as wanton impertinence or as meaningless folly.

It was impossible to suppose that the Canon would keep either opinion to himself, and Quentillian felt it unlikely that he would himself receive any opportunity for demolishing his senior's views.

"I think I had rather not inflict my trivialities upon you at all, sir," he remarked with truth, and yet with an absence of sincerity of which he felt that Lucilla, at all events, was quite as well aware as he was himself. "I assure you that I'm not worth reading."

"I shall judge of that for myself," said the Canon kindly. "Was there not something in that *Review* that was sent to you, Flora?"

"Yes," said Flora unwillingly.

"Fetch it, my dear."

Quentillian cast his mind over his more recent productions, and was invaded by a grim dismay.

His opinion of the Canon's literary judgment, where writings not directly connected with Church matters were concerned, was of the slightest, but he disliked the thought both of the pain that the elder man would feel in reading

that which would offend his taste, and of the remonstrance that he would certainly believe it his duty to make.

It was a relief to him when Flora returned without the *Review* and said :

“ There is someone who wants to speak to you in the hall, father. I’m so sorry.”

The Canon rose at once.

“ ‘ The man who wants me is the man I want,’ ” he quoted, and left the room.

When the door had closed behind him, Flora said to her sister, with a certain ruthless disregard of Quentillian’s presence that at least established the earnestness of her concern:

“ What shall we do ? ”

“ Nothing,” said Lucilla laconically.

“ But we can’t let him see that *Review*. Adrian sent it to me—it’s got something in it by that man Hale. Father would hate the whole thing.”

Lucilla looked at Quentillian.

“ He won’t like my article, and I should very much prefer him not to read it,” said the author candidly.

She smiled slightly.

“ It’s the one on ‘ The Myth of Self-sacrifice ’ ? ”

Owen nodded.

“ It might have been worse,” said Lucilla. “ It might have been the one in which you said that the parental instinct was only another name for the possessive instinct. And now I come to think of it, that one was called ‘ The Sanctification of Domestic Tyranny,’ wasn’t it ? ”

“ It was,” said Quentillian, in a tone which struck himself as being rather that of a defiant child to its nurse.

“ Well, father would have liked that even less than ‘ The Myth of Self-sacrifice,’ I imagine.”

She spoke without acrimony, without, in fact, any effect

at all of personal bias, but Quentillian said dispassionately :

" You dislike the modern school of thought of which my writings are a feeble example. May I ask why you read them ? "

" But I don't dislike it, Owen," she returned, with a calm at least equal to his own. " As for what you write, I think you're very often mistaken, but that doesn't prevent my being interested.

Quentillian was slightly taken aback at being considered mistaken, and still more at being told so. He had always respected Lucilla, both morally and intellectually, and he would have preferred to suppose the admiration mutual.

" Owen, haven't you got anything else that he could have to read ? " broke in Flora.

" Nothing that he would—care for," answered Quentillian, who had very nearly said, " Nothing that he would understand."

" Father has asked for the *Review*, Flossie, and you'd better get it. You needn't work yourself up about it. He knows its general character quite as well as you do."

" I don't think he ought to be allowed to make himself needlessly unhappy," said Flora obstinately.

" You can't prevent it."

" I suppose it would be wrong to say that I don't know where the *Review* is ? "

" It would be foolish, which is worse," said Lucilla curtly.

Her unmoral pronouncement closed the discussion.

Flora, looking grave and unhappy, left the room, and presently returned with the instrument of destruction, as she evidently regarded the production.

" Let us hope that Canon Mordard will continue to be detained," said Quentillian, not altogether ironically.

Flora made no reply.

In less than a quarter of an hour's time the Canon came back again, picked up the *Review*, and made a careful scrutiny of the table of contents.

"'The *Myth* of Self-sacrifice'?" he enunciated, with a strongly enquiring inflexion in his tone, as though prepared to receive the writer's instant assurance that he was not responsible for so strange a heading.

Owen desired to leave the room, but was mysteriously compelled to remain in it, glancing at intervals at the all too expressive face of his reader.

The Canon read very attentively, pausing every now and then to turn back a page or two, as though comparing inconsistencies of text, and sometimes also turning on a page or two ahead, as if desirous of establishing the certainty that a conclusion was eventually to be attained. His eyebrows worked as he read, after a fashion habitual with him.

There had been evenings when Flora had made the slightest of pencil sketches, hardly caricaturing, but embodying, this peculiarity, for her father's subsequent indulgent amusement. But no such artistic pleasantry was undertaken to-night. The atmosphere did not lend itself to pleasantry of any kind.

At last the Canon closed the volume, laid it down, and removed his glasses with some deliberation.

"Dear lad, I am disappointed."

"I was afraid you would be."

"Is this quite worthy of you?"

Owen felt that a reply either in the affirmative or in the negative would be equally unsatisfactory, and made none.

"You have adopted the tone of the day to an extent for which I was by no means prepared," the Canon said gently. "I am sorry for it, Owen—very sorry. I think

you have heard me speak before of my dislike for the modern note, that emphasises the material aspect, that miscalls ugliness realism, and coarseness strength. Forgive me, dear Owen, if I hurt you, but this—this trivial flippancy of yours, has hurt *me*."

Owen had no doubt that Canon Mordard spoke the truth.

"How emphatically he belongs to the generation that took the errors of other people to heart!" Quentillian reflected.

He felt no great sympathy with such vicarious distresses.

"There is so much that is sad and bad in life, that one longs to read of happiness, and hope, and beauty," said the Canon. "Why not, dear Owen, seek out and write of the 'something afar from the sphere of our sorrow'?"

"Because, to my way of thinking, only first-hand impressions are of any value. The only value that any point of view of mine can lay claim to, must lie in its sincerity."

"Words, words! You delude yourself with many words," said the Canon sadly, rousing in Quentillian a strong desire to retort with the obvious *tu quoque*.

"Do not misunderstand me, dear fellow—there is talent there—perversely exercised, if you will, but talent. I cannot but believe that life has many lessons in store for you, and when you have learnt them, then you will write more kindly of human nature, more reverently of Divine."

Hope was once more discernible in the Canon's voice and on his face, and as he rose he laid his hand affectionately upon the young man's arm.

"Hoping all things—believing all things," he murmured, as he left the room.

Quentillian was left to the certainty that his brief exposition of his literary *credo* had entirely failed to convey

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any meaning to the Canon, and that the long list of the Canon's optimistic articles of faith now included his own regeneration.

(vi)

"Father, I think Flora looks ill."

Canon Morchard gazed with concern at Lucilla as she made the announcement, and at once devoted himself to the anxious analysis that he always accorded to any problem affecting one of his children.

"I have thought her altered myself, by the great grief of last year. Spiritually, it has developed her, I believe. But there is a sustained melancholy about her, an absence of all hopeful reaction such as one looks for from youth, that is certainly not wholly natural. You, too, have observed it?"

"Yes."

Lucilla had observed a great deal more besides, and she was at a loss for a definition of her secret, latent fears.

"Flossie has become very irritable," she said at last, voicing the least of her anxieties.

"My dear, is that perfectly kind? Flora has had much to try her, and your own absence in Canada threw a great deal for which she is scarcely fitted upon her shoulders. I do so want you to overcome that *critical* spirit of yours, dear Lucilla. It has very often disturbed me."

Lucilla thought for a moment, and decided, without resentment as without surprise, that it would be of no use to say that her observation had not contained any of the spirit of criticism at all. She said instead:

"She doesn't sleep well, and she is always up very early."

"She is always at the early Celebration, dear child!" said the Canon tenderly. "Our Flora's religion is a very living reality to her—more so than ever of late, I think."

"It's a pity that it should make her unhappy, instead of happy."

"What are you saying, Lucilla?" the Canon enquired in highly displeased accents.

"It is perfectly true. She is very restless, and very unhappy, and the more she goes to church, the less it seems to satisfy her."

"And who are you, to judge thus of another's spiritual experiences? You mean well, Lucilla, but there is a materialism about your point of view that has long made me uneasy—exceedingly uneasy. You were encumbered with household cares very young, and it has given you the spirit of Martha, rather than the spirit of Mary. Leave Flora to my direction, if you please."

"I should like her to see the doctor."

"Has she complained of ill-health?"

"No, not at all. She resents being asked if she is well."

"Most naturally. She is not a child. You take too much upon yourself, Lucilla, as I have told you before. Leave Flora's welfare in Higher Hands than ours, and remember that it is not the part of a Christian to anticipate trouble. Where is your faith?"

Lucilla was not unaccustomed to this enquiry, and did not deem any specific reply to be necessary. Whatever the whereabouts of that which the Canon termed her faith, it did not serve in any way to allay her anxiety.

She watched Flora day by day.

She saw her increasing pallor, her gradual loss of weight, the black lines that deepened beneath her eyes. Above all, she saw the mysterious sense of grievance, that most

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salient characteristic of the neurotic, gather round her sister's spirit.

After a little while she ceased to talk of her visit to Canada, of Valeria and Valeria's children, because she saw that Flora could not bear these subjects.

"She's *jealous*," thought Lucilla, with a sick pang of pity.

Flora went to church more frequently than ever.

Lucilla wondered very often if anything had happened while she was away.

One day she asked Owen Quentillian.

"There was the shock of David's death," he said rather lamely.

"Yes. Father says it affected Flora terribly for a long while."

"Do you find her much changed, then?"

"I find her very unbalanced," said Lucilla, with her usual directness.

"I think she *is* an unbalanced person," Quentillian assented levelly.

"I wish she could leave home for a time."

But Flora, when this was suggested to her, said that she did not wish to leave home. Her manner implied that the suggestion hurt her.

At first the Canon was pleased, assuring Lucilla that the pleasant home-life at St. Gwenllian, even if robbed of its old-time joyousness, would best restore Flora to herself. But after a time he, too, watched her with anxiety.

"Little Flora is not herself," he began to say.

"Let me send for the doctor, father," Lucilla urged.

"We will see, my dear, later on. The unsettled weather is trying to us all just now—no doubt things will right themselves in a day or two, and we shall smile at our own foolish, faithless fears."

Meanwhile, however, no one at St. Gwenllian evinced any desire to smile at anything, and Flora became subject to violent fits of crying.

Her dignity and her delicate reticence seemed alike to have deserted her. She cried in church, and sometimes she cried at home, regardless of the presence of her father and sister.

"My dear, what is it?" the Canon enquired at last, long after Lucilla had given up asking the same question in despair.

"Nothing," said Flora.

"It is not right to prolong your sorrow for our dear one in this fashion," said the Canon. "Can we not trust dear David to the Everlasting Arms, and fulfil our own appointed days here below?"

His daughter made no reply.

"This is reaction, Flora," said Canon Mordard decisively. "When this heavy blow first fell upon us, you were my courageous daughter, my comforter—so far as that was humanly possible. Do not falter now—remember that whom He loveth, He chastiseth."

"I do remember," she said, her face a mask of misery.

"You are not well," said the Canon tenderly. "I shall no longer allow you to exert yourself as you have been doing. Lucilla here will arrange that your class shall be temporarily given over to other management, and no doubt she can herself contrive to replace you at the choir practises."

"I can arrange it," Lucilla said, "but——"

She looked at her sister.

Flora broke into a tempest of tears.

"Don't take away what work I *can* do!" she sobbed out. "My life is useless enough, in all conscience."

"Flora!" the Canon thundered. "Have a care! Such a thought is perilously near to being a blasphemous one."

She hid her face in her hands.

"You are unstrung, my poor child," said her father.

He took to treating her almost as an invalid, and failed to perceive that his watchful and incessant solicitude produced upon Flora's nerves an effect that was the very reverse of soothing.

"She ought to go right away from home," said Lucilla to Quentillian. "But it's difficult to suggest it again—she was so much upset when I spoke of it before. Will you try what you can do, Owen? She is a great deal more likely to listen to someone who is not one of the family. It's one of the symptoms."

"Symptoms of what?"

"Of hysteria," said Lucilla succinctly, facing the word as she had already faced the fact.

Quentillian admired her directness, but it did not breed in him any desire to adopt the measure suggested, and speak to Flora.

At last, however, he did so. They had scarcely been alone together since the day when she had told him of her visit to Mrs. Carey.

"Is that business on your mind, Flora?"

He had thought for some time that it might be.

"What?"

"Mrs. Carey, I mean."

She coloured deeply.

"I did what I thought right at the time, Owen. Is there any necessity to discuss it again?"

"Not if you don't wish to, certainly. I had an idea that it might be a relief. I suppose no one knows beside ourselves?"

"No one. She never wrote to me, you know, and I feel sure she never will. She was the sort of person to be thoroughly absorbed by her impressions of the moment. I sometimes wonder what happened to her in Scotland."

"It is not very difficult to guess what *will* happen, sooner or later, from what you told me. People like Mrs. Carey live from one emotional crisis to another."

She gave him a curious look.

"At least it's living—not stagnation. That interview with Mrs. Carey seems like a dream, almost, nowadays—something quite apart from the rest of my life. I suppose it's because it's the only thing I've ever done entirely by myself, without any of the family knowing about it. I've never even seen anyone else at all like Mrs. Carey—it was impossible to get into touch with her, really. She was like a painted cardboard figure, with no back to it—nothing solid."

"But you've turned down that page now—it's finished with?"

"Yes," she said, looking down.

He had wondered whether that which he sometimes thought of as Flora's Jesuitical plotting, had come to prey upon her mind.

Evidently, if it did, he was not to be told so.

In the end he could think of no more subtle enquiry than:

"Why are you unhappy?"

"I don't know," she said with a trembling lip. "I feel I'm of no use in the world. Wouldn't you be unhappy if you felt like that—that nobody really needed you in any way, and you had nothing to do?"

"Not in the least," said Quentillian reflectively. "I am quite sure that nobody does need me, and it doesn't

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distress me. As for having nothing to do, I imagine—if you will forgive me for saying so—that one can always find something if one looks far enough."

"It's different for a man."

"Perhaps."

Quentillian went away still undetermined whether Flora's conduct of the *affaire* Carey was the cause or the result of her unmistakable hysteria.

That she had all the makings of a fanatic he had long suspected, and the Canon's determination to treat her as an invalid, in need of rest and complete inaction, seemed to him to be a singularly ill-advised one.

In spite of his disapproval of her methods, Quentillian had come to feel a certain affection for Flora, and he could not avoid a sense of complicity that drew him to her, even while it chafed his self-righteousness.

With an entire lack of originality, he informed Lucilla that he thought her sister would be better away from home.

"Well, so do I. But to go away for a few weeks would only be a half-measure. Owen, I'm frightened about Flora—far more than I've ever been about anyone before."

He could partly apprehend her meaning.

"Don't you think that perhaps this—phase—is only another manifestation of the same spirit that made Val want to go and work somewhere?"

"In a sense, yes. You see, all the intellectual interests, and the mental appreciations, to which we were brought up, although those things did fill our days—at least before the war—were only superimposed on what Val and Flossie and Adrian really were, in themselves. Not essentials, I mean, to either of them."

Quentillian wondered what Lucilla's own essentials might be. She had given him no hint of them, ever, and

yet he suspected her of an almost aggressive neutrality with regard to the imposed interests of which she had spoken.

The odd contradiction in terms seemed to him expressive of the difference that he felt certain existed between Lucilla's daily life and the personal, intimate standpoint from which she all the time regarded that life.

Something of the same ruthlessness of purpose that had once characterised Flora he had always discerned in Lucilla, but he felt very certain that her essential sanity and humour would have kept her for ever from the strange and tortuous means adopted by Flora to safeguard those interests of which she apparently felt herself to be a better judge than her Creator.

Lucilla would neither juggle with fate nor see any justification for tampering with other people's correspondence.

"Flora thinks now that she doesn't want to go away from home."

"It's a pity, perhaps, that she didn't go to Canada instead of you."

"Yes, but you see father didn't really want either of us to go, and Flossie wouldn't have disobeyed him."

Flora's conscience! Owen felt as impatient at the thought of it as he had frequently felt before. He had, however, long ago sufficiently assimilated the atmosphere of St. Gwenllian to refrain from pointing out that Flora had been for some years of an age to act for herself, independently of the parental sanction. He did not, indeed, suppose that Lucilla needed to have anything so self-evident put before her.

"Do you think Flora would consent to see a doctor?"

"No."

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Miss M orchard's unvarnished noes and yeses always took him slightly by surprise, especially after any time spent with the Canon.

"The fact is," said Lucilla vigorously, "that Flora needs something to occupy her mind. She is preying on herself, and unless something happens to take her out of herself, Owen, I think she will go mad."

He instinctively paid the homage due to her habitual precision of expression by taking the startling phrase literally.

"Have you told anyone?"

"Not yet."

"But you must. If you really think that, you must tell the Canon so."

"I know." Her voice was rather faint, but she repeated, more strongly and with entire acceptance in her voice, "I know I must."

It reminded him of the long past days when one of the St. Gwenllian children had been naughty, and the task of taking the culprit before the Canon had invariably, and as a matter of course, devolved upon Lucilla.

(vii)

"Flora is treading the thorny way that saints have trodden. If your own spirituality, which is in its infancy—in its cradle, I may say—does not enable you to understand that *via dolorosa*, at least refrain from trivial interpolations and misinterpretations, Lucilla, I beg."

Canon M orchard's tone rather suggested commanding than begging, and his large eyes seemed to flash with

indignation as they looked from beneath corrugated brows at Lucilla.

She was rather paler than her usually colourless wont.

"I am afraid that Flora is suffering from a very common form of hysteria, father, and I thoroughly distrust any inspiration of hers in her present state of health."

"She has told me herself that she is in her usual health, and that she positively objects to the idea of seeing a medical man. I see no reason for disbelieving her own statement."

"Well, I do."

"Lucilla, you forget yourself."

Lucilla and the Canon looked at one another, each seeming momentarily to despair of the other.

At last Lucilla said :

"A little time ago you thought she was ill too."

"Mind and body react upon one another, no doubt, and our little Flora is highly strung. I do not recognise it as being in any way incumbent upon me to explain to you my treatment of any soul in my charge, Lucilla, but I may say that I have now come to the conclusion that Flora's malady was of the soul. With that, you must rest content."

Lucilla did not rest content at all.

A philosophical acceptance of the inevitable had long been part of Miss Mordard's life, but in the weeks that followed she came nearer to the futility of the spoken protest than ever before.

From seemingly eternal weeping, however, Flora presently passed to a tense exaltation of spirit that found its culmination in long hours spent upon her knees.

Lucilla made only one appeal to her.

"Flossie, won't you tell me what's happening? I can't help knowing that you've been very unhappy."

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"I'm not unhappy now," said Flora quickly. "At least, not like I was before. You know I've put myself absolutely under father's direction, Lucilla? How wonderful he is!"

"He has made you happier?"

"Not he himself. He has shown me where to find peace at last."

"If you mean church, I should have thought you'd known about it ever since you were born, very nearly."

If the faint hint of impatient derision latent in her sister's tone was perceptible to Flora, she showed no resentment at it.

She flushed deeply and looked earnestly at Lucilla.

"I wish I could make you understand. But some things are too sacred to be described, even if one could. The only thing I can say is that I was unhappy, I felt I was wasting my life, and that nobody cared. And I was full of remorse for a wrong I had done. I can't tell you what it was, Lucilla, nor anyone else, ever, and I can't undo it, now, but at least I can expiate it, and all my other failings."

"Expiation?" Lucilla spoke the word unenthusiastically. "But if you can't undo whatever it was you did—and really, Flossie, I can't believe it was anything so very desperate—will it be a good plan to go on being miserable about it for the rest of your life, all to no purpose?"

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness," Flora replied gently.

Lucilla was left to apply the truth of the adage to her own condition of mind.

She was very unhappy about her sister.

Nevertheless, Flora had ceased to weep, and although she ate less than ever and rose early for the purpose of

going to church, she looked rather less ill. Only the strained look in her eyes remained, ever increasing, to justify Lucilla's feeling of sick dismay.

That it was entirely unshared by Canon Mordard she knew already, but she was not altogether prepared for the announcement that he presently made.

"I am very happy about our little Flora—peculiarly and wonderfully so. What think you, Lucilla, of this? Flora is turning her thoughts towards the Sisterhood at St. Marychurch."

It was never Miss Mordard's way to respond over-emphatically to an invitation from her father to state her thoughts freely, experience having long since taught her what a tangled web we weave when first we practise speaking the truth inopportunely.

"Has she only just started the idea?"

"Nay, she tells me—and I can readily believe it—that the grace of God, according to its mysterious wont, has been working within her for a long while now. There has been a period of darkness for Flora, undoubtedly, but she is emerging more and more into the light—that light that shineth into the Perfect Day!"

The Canon seemed rather inclined to forget himself in profound musings.

"It implies losing her," said Lucilla.

"Humanly speaking, yes, and it is hard to eradicate the human element. But once that is done—and done it *shall* be—what remains is altogether joyful. I shall see her go, if go she does, with feelings far other than those with which I saw our poor Valeria leave home!"

Lucilla thought so too, and would emphatically have given the preference to Valeria's method of inaugurating an independent career.

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" *I cannot* be anything but glad that one of mine should be dedicated!" the Canon exclaimed, as though the exclamation broke from him almost irrepressibly.

" But does Flora mean to go away at once?"

" She wishes it greatly, and I should hardly feel justified in restraining her. Flora is not a child, and her own desire, as she says herself, is to feel that wayward, wayless will of hers at safe anchorage at last. Dear child, her one regret is for me."

Tears stood in the Canon's eyes.

" The grief of last winter greatly developed Flora, I believe. There has been a tendency to dreaminess, to a too great absorption in her music, that I confess has made me anxious in the past. But she speaks most rightly and nobly of her certainty that a call has come to her, and if so, it is indeed a vocation that must not be gainsaid. She is all ardour and anxiety to begin, and if all is well she and I go to St. Marychurch to view the establishment there next week, and enter into the necessary arrangements."

" What sort of life will it mean for her?"

" One of direct service, dear Lucilla, of shelter from the temptations of this world, of close personal union with Christ Himself, I trust. All indeed are not called to such union, but I believe with all my heart that our Flora is amongst the chosen few, and, grievous though it be to lose her from our sadly diminished home-circle, I cannot but rejoice for her, and with her."

The Canon's voice trembled very much as he spoke, but his smile was one of single-hearted sincerity.

" But *does* she rejoice?" said Lucilla rather faintly.

" Indeed she does. I confess that Flora's earnest desire for self-immolation, her ardent spirit, have taken me by

surprise. She is of the stuff of which the martyrs were made. No austerity has any terrors for her—she is already far advanced upon the way of the mystic."

Lucilla wrung her hands together.

"What is it, my dear one?" said her father gently.

She could not tell him. She felt unable to voice the terror and the profound distrust that possessed her at the thought of Flora, fanatically eager for discipline of her own seeking, finding in religious emotionalism an outlet for instincts that she had not dared, so far as Lucilla could judge, to call by their right name.

"One can only let other people go their own way, then?" she murmured, more to herself than to the Canon.

"Say, rather, the way appointed for them, dear Lucilla. Yours and mine may lie together yet awhile longer, I trust, but I am no longer young, and these repeated partings tell upon me. It is a sacrifice for you, too, to make, but let us do so cheerfully—aye, and right thankfully, too. Our little one has been chosen for the Bride of Heaven, as the beautiful old devotional phrase has it."

Lucilla was only too conscious that the beautiful old devotional phrase awoke nothing in herself but a shuddering distaste.

She could not doubt, however, that its effect upon Flora was far otherwise.

Although she saw, as time went by, that no outside influence would have power to shatter the vision so clearly before the Canon's eyes, and to which he so unfalteringly directed Flora's gaze, it brought to her a slight sense of personal relief when the Canon, after inditing a letter of his usual unbridled length and meticulous candour, informed her that he had besought Quentillian to spend at

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St. Gwenllian that which he emphasised as Flora's last evening at home.

"It will make it easier for us all, to have that dearest of dear fellows amongst us. He is so truly one of ourselves, and yet the mere presence of someone who does not always form part of our familiar little circle will prevent over-much dwelling upon the tender associations of the past that are well-nigh beyond bearing, as such a time as this."

(viii)

Owen, laconic as Lucilla herself, made no attempt to conceal either his personal dislike of the solution to Flora's problem nor his innate conviction of her complete right to any form of self-slaughter that she might select.

They exchanged no opinions, but he found occasion to say to her in private :

"One thing, Flora. Will you leave me to deal with the Mrs. Carey equation, if it ever comes to be necessary ? "

"I hope it never will."

"So do I. But make it your legacy to me, so that if ever it has to be thought of again, I may do as seems best to me."

Flora smiled, her shadowy, tremulous smile.

"Wouldn't you do that anyway ? "

"Perhaps I should. But I would rather have your permission. And after all, you know, Flora, you won't be able to pull strings from your Sisterhood."

It was the last, almost the only, reference that he would permit himself, and both could smile at it faintly.

"Very well, Owen. I don't want to remember it ever

again, and I shall only think of Mrs. Carey now in one way."

She lacked the Canon's capacity for outward expression even now, and her colour rose as she spoke.

Only in earnest and uncondemnatory intercession would Mrs. Carey find place again in Flora's thoughts.

Owen knew it as well as though she had told him so.

The evening was mild and beautiful, and the Canon sat at the open window, leaning back as though greatly fatigued, and asked Flora for some music.

"Shall I sing?" she asked.

"Are you able to, my dear?"

"Yes, indeed," she said earnestly, and Quentillian could surmise that she was instinctively eager for the form of self-expression most natural to her, as a vent for her own mingled emotions.

Her voice was more beautiful than ever, with a depth of feeling new to it.

Quentillian was indignant with himself when he found that this perfectly traditional setting for a pathetic situation was unmistakably affecting him.

The only light round them was that of the summer's evening, and Flora's voice came with strength and sweetness and purity from her scarcely-seen figure at the far end of the room, in well-remembered and intrinsically exquisite melody. She was part of his childhood—she was young—she was going away, a voluntary sacrifice—they would none of them ever again see Flora, as they had known her, any more. . . .

Quentillian, in a violent endeavour to react from an emotion that he unsparingly qualified as blatant, turned his eyes away from the singer.

He looked at Lucilla, and saw that she sat very still. He reflected that for a face so sensitive, and possessed of

so much latent humour, hers was singularly inexpressive of anything but placidity. Nevertheless, it was a placidity that had its origin, most unmistakably, in a self-control acquired long since, rather than in an absence of any capacity for strong feeling.

He wondered, not for the first time, what her life had taught Lucilla.

He looked at Canon Mordard.

The Canon had closed his eyes, and his face, on which the lines were showing heavily at last, was white with the grey pallor of age. Nevertheless, he, too, showed the deep, essential placidity of a conscious acceptance, and for the first time Quentillian perceived a fundamental resemblance between the Canon and his eldest daughter.

As though aware of the scrutiny fixed upon him, the Canon opened his eyes, and smiled as they met Quentillian's.

"That harmony will be lost to us for a time, perhaps," he said softly. "But is it not a foretaste of that great Song of Praise that will have no ending, and in which all, all, will be able to join together? I think so, Owen."

He turned his head slightly, his finger-tips joined together in the position habitual to him.

"Flora, my child, my dear daughter, will it be too much if I ask for 'Lead, kindly Light,' as you have so often given it to us on long-ago Sundays when we have been all together—all together?"

For answer she struck the opening chords very gently:

"Lead, kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom,  
Lead Thou me on.  
The night is dark, and I am far from home :  
Lead Thou me on.  
. . . Till, the night is gone.  
And with the morn those angel faces smile  
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile."

Flora's voice was rapt and unfaltering.

Lucilla did not move nor raise her eyes.

It was Owen Quentillian, poignantly and unwillingly conscious of pathos, who set his teeth in a profound and intense resentment at the obvious emotional appeal that he found himself unable to ignore.

He unspeakably dreaded the breakdown of the Canon's composure that he foresaw when Flora's last note had died away into silence.

He could not look up.

"Flora!"

The Canon's voice was steady and gentle.

"Thank you, my child. Bid me good-night, and go now. You must have some rest before your journey tomorrow."

She came to him, and he blessed and kissed her as usual, only letting his hand linger for a moment on her head, as he repeated as though speaking to himself:

"And with the morn those angel faces smile  
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile."

"Good-night, Owen. Good-bye," said Flora very quietly.

She left the room, and the Canon raised himself with difficulty from his low chair and said:

"I have some preparations to make for to-morrow. I will leave you for a little while."

When he had gone, Owen felt the relaxation of his own mental tension.

For the first time, and with a sincerity that left him amazed, he found himself making use of the phrase that from others had so often aroused rebellion in himself:

"He is wonderful!"

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Lucilla raised her eyes now, and looked full and gravely at Quentillian.

"Yes. I'm glad you see it at last, Owen."

"At last?" he stammered, replying to her voice rather than to her words.

"He is very fond of you. He has always been very fond of you, ever since you were a little boy. And it has—vexed me—very often, to see that you gave him nothing in return, that, because he belongs to another school, and another generation, you have almost despised him, I think."

Owen was conscious of colouring deeply in his sudden surprise and humiliation.

"Although you are so clever, Owen," she said in the same grave, unironical tone, "it has seemed as though you are not able, at all, to see beyond the surface. I know that my father's religious sentiment, sentimentality even, his constant outward expression of emotional piety, his guileless optimism, have all jarred upon you. But you have had no eyes for his pathetic courage, his constant striving for what he sees as the highest."

"Lucilla—in justice to myself—although what you say may be true, if I have judged your father it has been far more on account of his children—of what I have seen of their lives."

"You were not called upon to constitute yourself the champion of his children. Valeria, even, had no claim on your championship. It was not you whom she loved, and you, too, tried to make Val what she was never meant to be. When Val threw you over, if my father tried to force upon you what you could only see as the conventional *beau geste* of renunciation, it was because he was incapable of believing that you could have asked a woman

to marry you without loving her, body and soul. His forgiveness of Val, whether you thought him entitled to forgive or not, lay between him and her. And when you speak of our lives, Owen, can't you see that Val and Flora and Adrian and I, and perhaps David too, have come to what we were meant for? No one can stand between another soul and life, really."

He was oddly struck by the echo of words that he had himself once used to Flora.

" You admit that he tried to stand between you and life ? "

" I do," she said instantly. " But if he had succeeded, the fault would have been ours."

She suddenly smiled.

" Isn't it true that to face facts means freedom ? That's why I'm not an optimist, Owen. I am willing to face all the facts you like. But you, I think, in judging my father, have only faced half of them."

" You find me intolerant ! " he exclaimed half-ironically. Never before had such an adjective been presented to his strong sense of his own impartiality, his detached rationalism.

" Not exactly. Only, I'm afraid—a little bit of a prig."

She uttered the strange, unimposing accusation, not rudely, not unkindly, but almost mournfully.

" Christianity has been accused of intolerance very often, and with only too much reason, but those outside the Churches, who frankly claim to be agnostic, often seem to me to be the most intolerant of all, of what they look upon as superstition. Why should you despise my father for beliefs that have led him to lead an honourable life, and that have given him courage to bear his many sorrows ? "

" You have said yourself that 'the facing of facts means

freedom. I can see no freedom, and therefore no beauty, in living in illusion."

"Not for yourself, perhaps. Illusions could never be anything but conscious, for you."

"Nor for yourself, Lucilla," he retorted swiftly.

"But how does that entitle us to despise another for holding them?" she demanded, quite as swiftly. Nevertheless, Owen detected a lessening of severity, in so far as she had coupled them together in her speech.

"To-night," he said gravely, "I admired your father with all my heart."

"I'm glad."

On the words, the same as those with which Lucilla had begun their brief and rather amazing conversation, the Canon returned into the room.



IV  
THE DEATH OF AN OPTIMIST



**IV****THE DEATH OF AN OPTIMIST****(1)**

QUENTILLIAN'S next and final summons to St. Gwenllian came some months after Canon Mordard had taken Flora to her Sisterhood, and returned alone.

Owen was unprepared for the change in the Canon's appearance, although he knew him to be ill.

"Aye, dear lad! It's the last stage of the journey. I have thought that it was so for some time, and they tell me now that there is no doubt of it. This poor clay is worn out, and the spirit within is to be set free. Verily I can still repeat those favourite words of mine: 'All things work together for good, to those that love God.' If you but knew the number of times during these last few years that I have cried out within myself, 'O for the wings of a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest'! And now it has come! and I hope to keep my Christmas feast among the blest. They tell me that it cannot be long."

Quentillian looked the enquiry that he felt it difficult to put into words.

"I can take very little. Soon, they tell me, even that little will have become impossible. See how even the crowning mercy of preparedness is vouchsafed to me! I have put my house in order as well as may be, and have

no care save for my poor Lucilla. She will be alone indeed, and it is for her sake, Owen, that I want you to do a great kindness to a dying man."

"Anything, sir. Do you want me to stay?"

"You have said it, Owen." The Canon laid his hand, thin now to emaciation, upon Quentillian's.

"Stay with us now until the end comes. It cannot be far off. I have outlived my brother and sister, and Lucilla's remaining aunt is old and infirm. It is not fit, even were it possible, that she should come here. She will receive Lucilla most tenderly after I am gone—of that I am assured—but there is no one to uphold her, to spare her needless distress, when the time comes."

"I will do everything that I can to help her."

"I know it, dear fellow—I know it. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. It seems natural to treat you as a son."

The Canon paused and looked wistfully at Quentillian upon the word.

"Perhaps Adrian will come home. I have written to him—a long letter. He need not be afraid of me. I have written to my three absent children. To Valeria—my blessing for her little sons. I would have given much to see them before going—aye, their mother too, my merry Valeria, as I once called her! I have missed Valeria's laughter in this quiet house, that was once full of merriment and children's voices. And I have written to Flora, my Flora who chose the better part. May she indeed be blessed in her choice—little Flora!"

He sank back, looking exhausted.

"I will stay as long as you wish me to stay, and I will do all that I can for Lucilla," repeated Quentillian.

"I know it. The last anxiety has been allayed. Aye,

Owen, I have ceased to concern myself with these things now, I hope. If Adrian comes to me, and if Lucilla can count upon you as upon a brother, than I am well satisfied indeed. My affairs are in good order, I believe. My will is with my solicitors—Lucilla knows the address. What there is goes in equal shares to Lucilla, Valeria, and Adrian. Flora has received her portion already. My books, dear Owen, are yours. All else—personal effects, manuscripts, and the rest—are Lucilla's. She has been my right hand. There are mementos to Clover, to one or two old friends and servants—nothing else. I have thought it well to make Lucilla sole executrix—she has helped in all my business for so long !

“ So you see that my temporal concerns are over and done with. In regard to the spiritual, I have had the unutterable honour and pleasure of a visit from the Bishop himself. He was all fatherly goodness and kindness. The dear Clover is always at hand for reading, and I can depend on him utterly for those last commendations that are to smooth my way down the Valley of the Shadow. There is nothing wanting. And now you have come ! ”

The Canon's wasted face was both radiant and serene.

The grief that had so often shown there seemed to have passed away, and Quentillian found it almost incredible that he had ever seen the Canon angry, or weighed down by a leaden depression of spirits.

“ Is he really happy, all the time ? ” Quentillian asked Lucilla.

“ Yes, all the time. Even when he has pain. But they say there won't be any more pain, most likely, now. He will just sink, gradually. If you knew how very little he is living on, even now, you would be surprised.”

“ Are you doing the nursing ? ”

"He wants a trained nurse. One has been sent for. He thinks that will spare me," said Lucilla, smiling a little.

In the days that followed, Owen saw how difficult Lucilla found it to be so spared.

The nurse was an efficient and conscientious woman, and the Canon quickly became dependent upon her. He begged Owen to spend as much time as possible with Lucilla, who remained downstairs, replying to the innumerable letters and to the enquirers who came to the house.

She was now only with her father for a brief morning visit and the hour in the afternoon when the nurse took her exercise out of doors. Very often Quentillian, at the Canon's request, was also with them then.

"Lucilla and I have long ago said our last words, such as they are," the Canon told him with a smile. "We understand one another too well to need to be left alone together."

Time slipped by with monotonous regularity, the changes in the Canon almost imperceptible to the onlookers.

Then, preceded only by a telegram, Adrian came home.

"My father isn't really dying, is he?" he asked piteously.

"He can't take anything at all now. It's a question almost of hours."

Lucilla took him upstairs to where his father lay, propped up on pillows, and they were left alone together.

"You know, it is very bad for Canon Mordard to have any agitation," the nurse anxiously pointed out to Lucilla, when the interview had lasted a long while.

"Can it make any real difference?"

"It may reduce his strength more quickly."

"He would say that it was worth it. He has not seen his son for a long while."

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Lucilla kept the woman out of the room as long as it was possible to do so.

At last Adrian came downstairs.

That evening, the Canon said to Quentillian, with tears in his eyes :

“ Adrian has promised me to give up his work for that man. Is it not wonderful, dear Owen ? All, all added unto me. If this pain of mine is to be the price of my boy’s awakening to his own better nature, how gladly shall I not pay it ! ”

It was the only time that Quentillian had ever heard him allude to having suffered physical pain.

“ I have not been so much at rest about Adrian since he was a little boy,” said the Canon. “ He was always the most affectionate of them all. And he cried like a little child, poor fellow, this afternoon, and voluntarily passed me his promise to leave that man.”

Quentillian’s own involuntary distrust of the promise given by a weak nature, under strong emotional stress, was profound, but he gave no sign of it. It no longer caused him any satisfaction to be aware of a deeper insight in himself than in the Canon. He could not share that guileless singleness of vision, and felt no envy of it, and yet he paradoxically desired that it should remain unimpaired.

He asked Lucilla if she knew of Adrian’s promise.

“ He told me. He was crying when he came down. He can’t believe even yet that father is dying, poor Adrian ! And yet he must believe it, really, to have made that promise.”

“ The Canon is so thankful for it.”

“ I know. He wanted it more than anything in the world. Everything has come to make it easy for him to go, Owen.”

Something in her tone made him say gently :

“ Poor Lucilla ! ”

Her eyes filled suddenly.

“ Even if the impression is only temporary, with Adrian, it will be a comfort to him afterwards. He is very unhappy now that there should have been any estrangement between them.”

It was evident enough that Lucilla, also, had no great reliance upon Adrian’s stability of purpose, although his present reaction had brought such joy and comfort to the dying man.

That night, for the first time, the Canon’s mind wandered. He spoke of his children as though all were once more of nursery age and at home together.

“ Little Adrian can take my hand, and then he can keep up with the others. Less noise, my dear—a little less noise. . . . Valeria’s voice is too often raised, too often raised, although I like its merry note, in fit and proper season. My merry Valeria ! Now, are we ready ? The sketch-book, Flora, the sketch-book. . . . I want to see that pretty attempt at the church finished.”

Then he said with an apologetic note in his voice :

“ Flora lacks perseverance, and is too easily discouraged, but we hope that she may show great feeling for art, by-and-bye. Lucilla’s *forte* lies in more practical directions. She is my housekeeper—my right hand, I often call her. Look, children, at that effect of sunlight through the beech-leaves—is it not wonderful ? Come, Adrian, my man, no lagging behind. . . .”

Presently a puzzled, distressed look came over his face, and he asked : “ Is not one missing ? Is David there ? ”

Lucilla bent over him to say, “ Yes, father,” but the distressed look still lingered.

"Where is David?" said the Canon. "Was there not some sadness—some trouble between us? No—no—all a dream."

His face lightened again. "David is safe home. I shall see David to-night."

By-and-bye he asked to be told the time.

It was nine o'clock.

The Canon's voice had become a weak whisper.

"I thought it was morning, and that I had them all again—little children. Such trustful little hands lying in mine . . . and the children have grown up and gone away. . . . No . . . Lucilla, you are there, are you not, my dear love? And Owen—Owen, that was like a third son to me. My own sons are there, too—David is safe home . . . only a very little way on . . . and Adrian, little Adrian—he promised . . . ah, all things work together for good. . . ."

His voice trailed thinly away into silence, his wan face was smiling.

"He will sleep," whispered the nurse, and her words were verified almost instantly.

Owen took Lucilla away.

There was a strong sense upon him that the summons would not be long delayed now.

Lucilla went downstairs and quietly opened the outer door into the garden. They walked up and down there, Owen watching the red spark waxing and waning from his own cigar. The night was extraordinarily still, the dark arch of the sky powdered with stars.

Neither spoke directly of that which occupied their minds most, but Quentillian said by-and-bye:

"Where shall you go, eventually?"

"Torquay, perhaps. There is an old aunt there—my

father's sister. I shall have just enough not to be dependent upon her, even if I make my home with her."

"Will that be congenial?"

Lucilla gave a little low, sad laugh.

"I don't think there's much alternative, is there? This house, of course, goes to the next incumbent. If Mr. Clover is appointed, and we very much hope that he will be, he would probably buy a good deal of the furniture (which is just as well, as it would certainly drop to pieces if we tried to move it). I couldn't possibly afford to set up house for myself in any case. And I must have something to do. Aunt Mary would find plenty for me to do."

"I daresay," said Quentillian without enthusiasm.

"Perhaps you are thinking of my taking up an occupation or profession seriously, but you know, Owen, it isn't really a practicable proposition, though one feels as though it ought to be. Just think for a minute, and tell me what I'm fit for—except, perhaps, being someone's housekeeper."

"My dear Lucilla, with your education, and the literary training your father has given you, surely anyone would be glad of your services."

"Not at all. I can't write shorthand. My typing, which I taught myself, isn't nearly as good or as quick as that of any little girl of sixteen who has learnt it properly, and can probably use half a dozen different makes of machine. I've never learnt office routine—filing, indexing, book-keeping, the use of a dictaphone. I believe all those things are necessary nowadays. I don't suppose if I did learn them all now I should ever be very good or very quick."

"I'm not suggesting that you should become a city clerk at forty shillings a week."

"A private secretary, then? I can't honestly see why anyone should employ a woman with no experience when there are so many experts wanting work. Languages might be an asset, but most people know French. German isn't likely to be wanted now, and I don't fancy there is any great demand for Latin or Greek. Even for teaching, schools want diplomas and certificates, besides proficiency in games."

"But the higher professions are all open to women of education nowadays," he protested. "You're not restricted to the kitchen or the nursery."

"Do you really think that I could work up, now, for a stiff legal or medical examination, and pass it?" she demanded with a sort of gentle irony. "You don't realise, Owen, that I'm nearly forty."

He had not realised it, and it silenced him momentarily.

"I know my chances went by a long time ago," said Lucilla. "I've never told anyone about it, but I think I'd like to tell you now, because I don't want you to think of me as a victim."

Quentillian registered a silent mental appreciation of a reason diametrically opposite to the reason for which the majority of confidences are bestowed.

"Before Val and Flossie grew up, it was obvious that I should stay at home and look after the house. Besides, I liked doing it. My father was—and is—the whole world to me. But there was a time, just once, when Val grew up, and David had gone away, when I wanted to go away too. Of course I'm talking of a good many years ago, and there weren't so many openings to choose from. But I wanted very much to go to college. Father could just have managed it, without being unfair to any of the others."

" You told him, then ? "

" Oh, yes, I told him."

" Would he not consent ? " enquired Owen, as she paused.

" He promised to consent if I still wished it after thinking it over."

" But he persuaded you not to wish it any more ? "

" No, it wasn't that. It's a little bit difficult to explain. He did ask me what I should gain by it, and whether it wasn't just restlessness and seeking a vocation to which I was not called. You remember hearing him say that about Val too ? "

" I remember."

" Well, that was all. He didn't say anything more. Of course I knew he wouldn't like my going away from him, without being told. But it was I who decided that it was an occasion for making what I'm afraid I thought of as a sacrifice."

She surprised him by a little laugh.

" You see, Owen, I think *now* that I was quite wrong."

" Quite wrong," he echoed gravely.

" It was an odd, muddled sort of time for some years after that. I suppose I was resenting my own decision, and yet trying to buoy myself up all the time by thinking of my own self-abnegation and generosity. It had seemed rather a beautiful thing to do at the time—to sacrifice my own life to my widowed father and my motherless brothers and sisters. At first, I remembered thinking that there would be something almost sacred about my everyday life at home."

" When people begin to think that things are sacred, it generally means that they're afraid of facing the truth about them."

" Exactly. It was a long time before I told myself the

truth. But in the end I did, when I saw that no one was likely to want to marry me, and that my life was going to be exactly what I had decided to let it be. And of course from the minute I faced it fair and square—after the first—it all became a great deal easier. Besides, there were compensations, really."

He made a sound of interrogation.

"Well, it's really a great thing to have a home. I've always felt sorry for women who lived in their boxes, and had nowhere of their own. And being mistress of the house all these years—I've liked that, and been fairly interested in it. And I've got imagination enough to see that books, and music, and a garden, to anyone brought up as we were especially, are quite important items. You know, women who have a career don't generally get those other things thrown in as well, unless they're exceptionally fortunate."

"You set them against independence and your own freedom?"

"I don't say that, but they *do* count," she said steadily. "If it comes to a question of relative values, of course they take second place—but once I'd admitted to myself, quite honestly, that I'd relinquished my chance of the best thing of all, then I could quite see those other things as being intrinsically worth something—a very good second best. They're really only unsatisfactory when one tries to think of them as substitutes. Taken at their own value—well, I've found them helpful, you know."

There was a silence before she spoke again.

"Most of all, there was father."

"That relationship has been the biggest factor in your life, of course."

"Yes." She paused, and then in a tone resolutely

matter-of-fact, said: "I think perhaps I won't talk about that, now. But I know just as well as you do, that in the course of nature, those particular links can only be expected to endure for a certain number of years. They're breaking now, for me, and it means that part of my life goes too."

He could not contradict her.

"Is Adrian any use?"

"Poor Adrian! He says now that he and I must keep together, and make a home for one another. He wants to comfort me, and he knows father would be glad, but you can see for yourself that it wouldn't be fair to take him at his word. Perhaps we may be together for a little while—till things have worn off, a little bit, for him. Adrian is emotional, isn't he? I don't know what he'll do, eventually."

The recollection of Adrian's promise to the Canon, that he would relinquish his work, was evidently not a factor that Lucilla took into serious consideration. By tacit agreement neither of them alluded to it.

"Valeria will hardly be able to come home, I suppose?"

"Oh no. It's out of the question. She couldn't leave the two babies, nor very well bring them with her."

"Flora?"

Already, Owen realised with faint surprise, he had come to remember Flora's corporeal existence only by an effort. He could scarcely feel her to be less separated from the realities of life than one who had died in youth and been long forgotten.

Lucilla only shook her head.

"They are all gone. Whatever anyone may say, Owen, Val and Flossie didn't shirk their chances. They said 'Yes' to Life as they saw it."

"Can you be glad of that?"

"Very glad. Even selfishly, I can be glad. Think of three—unfulfilled—lives to be spent side by side, held together by affection if you like, but fundamentally built on an artificial basis! No, no"—her smile held humour, rather than conscious valour, though Owen saw it as valiant too—"I'm glad to have faced my facts at last, though it ought to have been done long ago, when I made my choice. I'm not optimistic now, but I'm free."

As they turned at the end of the garden path, a dark figure sped across the grass towards them. Adrian's voice reached them, low and urgent.

"Come!"

(II)

The Canon lay back against his pillows, and it did not need the nurse's gesture to Lucilla to tell them that he was dying. His breath came loud and fast and his eyes were closed.

Adrian had flung himself on his knees at the bedside and was sobbing, his face hidden in his arms. Quen-tillian stood beside Lucilla, who held her father's hand in hers.

"Is he conscious?" Lucilla asked.

The nurse shook her head.

"Can anything be done to make it easier?" Lucilla said.

"No, my dear. I've sent messages for the doctor and Mr. Clover, but—"

Her face completed the sentence.

They remained motionless, Adrian's irregular sobs and the Canon's heavy breathing alone cutting intermittently across the silence.

Quentillian never knew how long it was before Canon Mordard opened his eyes and spoke, articulating with great difficulty.

"All safe—all happy . . . verily *all* things work together for good!"

He smiled, looking straight across at Owen Quentillian, and suddenly said with great distinctness:

"*Mors janua vita.*"

Owen could hear the cry still, ringing through the room, in the time of dumb struggle that followed.

It seemed a fitting epitome of the spirit that had been Fenwick Mordard's throughout his life.

Just before the first hint of day dawned into the room, Lucilla and the nurse laid back on to the pillows the form that they had been supporting.

Adrian was crying and shivering like a child.

"Take him downstairs and give him something hot to drink," the nurse commanded Owen. "There's a fire in the kitchen."

Quentillian looked at Lucilla.

"Please go," she said.

He went downstairs with Adrian.

"If only I'd been better to him! He was awfully good to me, really," sobbed Adrian. "He used to make an awful fuss of me when I was a little chap, and I wasn't half grateful enough—beast that I was!"

"Drink this."

"I can't."

"Of course you can. Try and be a man, Adrian, for your sister's sake."

"It's worse for me than for any of them," said Adrian ingenuously, "because I've got things to be remorseful about, and they haven't. And now it's too late!"

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" You were here in time," said Quentillian, abominably conscious and resentful of his own triteness.

" And I promised him I'd chuck my job. I think it comforted him."

" I'm sure it did."

" It was a sacrifice, in a way, to throw the whole thing up when I was doing well, and keen on it, and all that sort of thing, but I'm thankful now that I did it. Perhaps it made up to—*him*—for my having been such a hound, often and often."

It was oddly evident that Adrian was torn between genuine grief and shock and a latent desire to make the most of his own former depravity.

" I daresay you're thinking that, having been through the war and everything, I ought to be used to the sight of death," he said presently, " but it's quite different when it's like this. One got sort of hardened there, and everybody was running the same risk—oneself included. But my father—why, it seems like the end of everything, Owen. I must say I think I'm a bit young to have my home broken up like this, don't you ? "

" Very young," repeated Quentillian automatically, and yet not altogether without significance.

" I don't know what will happen, but of course Lucilla and I will have to leave St. Gwenllian. It's hard on her, too. I thought we ought to keep together, you know, for a bit. It seems more natural. I shall have to look for a fresh job, and I don't know what Hale will say to my chucking him."

Adrian was silent, obviously uneasy, and it was evident enough that it was the strong revulsion from that anxiety which prompted his next sudden outburst.

" I'm so awfully thankful that I had the strength to make

that promise about leaving Hale. It'll always be a comfort to me, to feel that I made a sacrifice for the dear old man, and that he—went—the happier for it. Mind you, I don't agree with him about Hale and Hale's crowd. Father had the old-fashioned ideas of his generation, you know, and of course all progress seemed a sort of vandalism to him. I daresay if he'd ever met Hale he'd have had his eyes opened a bit, and seen things quite differently. Hale was always jolly decent about him too—he'd read some of his stuff, and had quite a sort of admiration for it, in a way. Said it was reactionary, and all that, but perfectly sound in its own way, you know—scholarly, and all that kind of muck."

"Have you written to Hale?"

"No. Of course, in a way it's an awfully awkward situation for me, having to tell him why I'm not coming back to him, and so on. I thought I'd pop up and see him as soon as it could be managed. Of course there are arrangements to be made—"

The boy broke off in a fresh access of bewilderment and grief. "I simply can't realise he's gone, Owen. I say—you do think he was happy, don't you?"

"Yes."

"That promise of mine meant a lot to him. I'm so thankful that I've got that to remember. You might say, in a way, considering how much he always thought of us, that some of his children had rather let him down, in a way. I mean, Lucilla and I were the only two there, out of the five of us. Of course, David, poor chap, had gone already, and Val and Flossie couldn't very well help themselves—and yet there it was! Do you suppose that when he said—that—about 'all safe, all happy'—he was thinking of us?"

"Yes, I do."

"It's a comfort to know his mind was at rest. He wouldn't have said that if I hadn't made that promise, you know," said Adrian.

"Look here, Adrian, hadn't you better try and get some sleep? There'll be things to be done, later, you know, and you and I—if you'll let me help—must try and take some of it off Lucilla's hands."

All the child in Adrian responded to the transparent lure. He drew himself up.

"Thanks awfully, Owen. I shall be only too glad of your help. There'll be a good deal for me to see to, of course, so perhaps I'd better lie down for an hour or two while I can. What about Lucilla?"

"Would you like to come and find her?"

The boy shuddered violently.

"Not in there—I couldn't," he said piteously.

They went upstairs together.

As they passed the door of the Canon's room it was cautiously opened, and the nurse came outside and spoke to Adrian.

"The doctor should be here presently. I want him to see Miss Mordard. She turned faint a little while ago, and I've got her into her room, but I'm afraid she's in for a breakdown. I've seen them like this before, after a long strain, you know."

The woman's tone was professionally matter-of-fact.

"Had I better go to her?" said Adrian, troubled, and seeming rather resentful at the fresh anxiety thrust upon him.

"I shouldn't, if I were you. It'll only upset you. She's broken down a bit—hysterical. It'll relieve her, in the end. I shan't leave her now, till the doctor comes."

Lucilla hysterical!

Owen, almost more amazed than concerned, watched the nurse depart to what she evidently looked upon as a fresh case.

"Well, I can't do anything, I suppose?" said Adrian miserably.

"Go to bed," Quentillian repeated. "Shall I draft out some telegrams for you, and let you see them before they go? It's no use sending them to the post-office before eight."

"Don't you want to sleep yourself?"

"Not just now, thanks."

"Well, I'll relieve you at seven. Send someone to call me, will you?—though I don't suppose I shall sleep."

The boy trailed into his room, disconsolate and frightened-looking.

Owen Quentillian, searching for writing materials, found them on the table in the Canon's study, a table scrupulous in its orderliness, each stack of papers docketed, each article laid with symmetrical precision in its own place.

Owen would not sit there, where only the Canon had sat, under the crucifix mounted on the green velvet plaque. He went instead to another, smaller table, in the embrasure of a window, and sat there writing until the morning light streamed in upon him.

Then he laid down the pen, with a sense of the futility of activities that sought to cheat reflection, and let his mind dwell upon that which subconsciously obsessed it.

Canon Mordard had died as he had lived—an optimist. An invincible faith in the ultimate rightness of all things had been his to the end, and perhaps most of all at the end.

Quentillian envisaged the Canon's causes of thankfulness. He had seen his children as "safe" and "happy." Was it only because he had wanted so to see them?

David, who was dead, had been mourned for, but the Canon had been spared the deepest bitterness of separation. He had known nothing of the gulf widening between his own soul and that of his eldest son. . . .

A fool's paradise?

He had seen Lucilla as safe and happy.

And yet Lucilla's life was over, un-lived. As she herself had said, her chances had gone by. Torquay remained. It was not very difficult to imagine her days there. An old lady—the placid kindness accorded by the aged to the middle-ageing—the outside interests of a little music, a few books, a flower-garden—the pathetic, vicarious planning for scarcely-seen nephews and nieces—the quick, solitary walks, cut short by the fear of being missed, and then, as years went on, more solitude, and again more solitude.

Lucilla had said: "I'm not an optimist now—but I'm free."

From the bottom of his heart Owen recalled with thankfulness the fact of Lucilla's freed spirit.

It was the best that life would ever hold for her now.

His thoughts turned to Flora.

Quentillian could not envisage her life; eternally secluded, eternally withdrawn. She was lost to them, as they were lost to her.

Subconsciously, he was aware of associations connected with Flora's vocation upon which he preferred not to dwell. He knew, dimly, intuitively, that Lucilla's merciless clarity of outlook had seen Flora less as a voluntary sacrifice than as the self-deluded victim of fanaticism.

But no doubts had crossed the Canon's mind on Flora's behalf. He had known no distrust of her frantic craving for self-immolation, no dread of reaction coming too late.

He had thanked God for the dedication of Flora.

The one of his children for whom he had grieved perhaps longest was Valeria. And it was on Valeria that Owen's thoughts dwelt most gladly. She had purchased reality for herself, and although the price might include his own temporary discomfiture, Quentillian rejoiced in it candidly.

Nevertheless it was Val's error, and not Val's achievement, that her father had seen. His hope for her had been the ~~one~~ of ultimate reparation implied in his own favourite words—"All things work together for good."

And the Canon had quoted those words yet again when Adrian, his favourite child, had come back to him. His deepest thankfulness had been for the emotional, unstable promise volunteered by Adrian's impulsive youth.

Quentillian could see no reliance to be placed upon that promise to which the Canon, with so much ardent gratitude and joy, had trusted. Adrian would drift, the type that does little harm, if less good. Strength of intellect, as of character, had been denied him. No interest would hold him long, no aim seem to him to be worth sustained effort.

And yet the Canon had felt Adrian, too—perhaps most of all Adrian in the flush of reconciliation after their estrangement—to be "safe" and "happy."

Then optimism was merely a veil drawn across the nakedness of Truth?

From the depths of a profound and ingrained pessimism, Quentillian sought to view the question dispassionately, and felt himself fundamentally unable to do so.

Hard facts and—at best—resignation, or baseless hopes

and undaunted courage, such as had been Canon Morchard's?

The death of the Canon, bereft of all, and yet believing himself to possess all, had epitomised his life.

Overhead, sounds and stirrings had begun, and Quentillian softly let himself out of the house and stepped out into the fresh chill of the morning air. His eyelids were stiff and aching from his vigil, and sudden, most unwonted tears filled them. He glanced at the windows of the old house. A light still burned in Lucilla's, as though the nurse had been able to spare no thought from her ministrations.

Lucilla, the finest and bravest of the Canon's children, had been broken on the wheel.

In the passionless sorrow that possessed him, Quentillian grasped at a strand of consolation that he knew to exist somewhere. It had been found for him once before, by Canon Morchard.

He found it again, remembering.

*Mors janua vite.*

The Canon had proclaimed it, as a joyful certainty. Approached far otherwise, Owen could yet proclaim it too, as the supreme and ultimate Fact to be faced, of which the true realisation would strike for ever the balance between optimism and pessimism.

He turned towards the entrance again, and as he did so the blinds of Canon Morchard's room were drawn down, by a careful, unseen hand.



V  
OWEN AND LUCILLA



## V

## OWEN AND LUCILLA

(I)

IT was nearly a year later that Owen Quentillian went to Torquay to see Lucilla M orchard and ask her to marry him.

Nothing in the occasional letters that they had exchanged could have been regarded as in any way indicative of such a *dénouement*, and for once Owen saw Lucilla thoroughly disconcerted.

"But why?" she demanded, in a tone at once wistful and indignant.

Her face was pale and lined, but her eyes had lost neither humour nor sanity of outlook.

"Not for the only reason that it ought to be, dear Lucilla," he answered humbly. "But because of the awfulloneliness at Stear, and my own weakness which makes me afraid of it. And a little because of your sadness, here, perhaps, but most of all because you are the only person I know who can face facts, and *then* be happy. It's the most wonderful combination in life."

"You have faced facts, yourself."

"And it has only brought me bitterness."

She reflected for a moment and then said :

"That's true. But you won't find your remedy in marriage with me, Owen."

Her voice held all its old, crisp common-sense.

"Are you staying to tea, because, if so, my aunt will want some warning? She is old and fussy, and there's only one maid."

They had met out of doors.

"Pray don't let me cause any inconvenience," he said stiffly, offended by the irrelevance.

"It won't be in the least inconvenient," Lucilla assured him kindly. "Aunt Mary likes to see people very much, it's a new interest for her. Only it worries her if the drawing-room fire isn't lit, or there's no cake for tea. Things like that, you know."

He hardly did know, so different was his own world, and he could scarcely credit that Lucilla, the erstwhile mistress of St. Gwenllian, could know.

"You've remembered, of course," she said reflectively, "that I'm years older than you are?"

"What can that matter?"

"Nothing at all, certainly, if you've faced the risk that it entails and are prepared to take it. But of course, that isn't the only risk, Owen."

"I suppose not. Is this an acceptance or a refusal, Lucilla?"

They both broke into laughter.

"Here we are," said Lucilla, stopping at a little gate in a row of other little gates. "I'll walk with you to the station afterwards."

She paused, with her hand on the little gate, and looked at him.

"It's only that we are—or we ought to be—past the stage of following a generous impulse and hoping for the

best. I—I don't want either of us to bite off more than we can chew."

On the elegance of her simile, Miss Mordard opened the front door of "Balmoral" with a latch-key, allowing no time for a reply.

She left Quentillian in the tiny, red-tiled hall while she went into a room opening out of it that was as obviously the drawing-room as the room on the other side was the dining-room.

Quentillian looked round him, at the walls crowded with foolish brackets and bad water-colours, at the painted deal staircase and balusters, at the window on the landing that looked out on to a little back garden, and had a momentary vivid recollection of the shabby, dignified rooms at St. Gwenllian and the old cedars close to the tennis-court.

Lucilla had been fond of gardening.

From somewhere in the basement came the screeching note of a parrot.

Then Lucilla summoned him.

The drawing-room was exactly what he had expected it to be, and so was the aunt.

She talked a little about Torquay, and explained that she knew some of the residents but none of the visitors, unless there was "a link," and she asked Owen if he had read the life of Mary Slessor of Calabar.

He had not.

"You ought to read it. She was such a wonderful person," said the old lady with enthusiasm, and she talked about Foreign Missions for some time, though even this failed to enlighten the uninterested Quentillian on the identity of Mary Slessor of Calabar.

Lucilla did not talk very much—but then she never had talked very much.

The old aunt referred to her several times, and once said to Quentillian : " My niece is clever, you know. She reads a great deal. I like having an opinion to go by, and she chooses my books for me so much better than the girl at Boots' lending library. So many people just go by the name of the book, I fancy, but Lucilla and I like to know something about the author as well."

She spoke with a faint air of justifiable pride.

Quentillian suddenly thought of the mountain of manuscript concerning Leonidas of Alexandria, at the laborious compilation of which Lucilla had worked for so many years. He heard the oft-repeated tag of which Canon Morchard had been fond—"Lucilla here, is our literary critic."

A small, panting maid brought in tea, and the old lady poured it out, and was very meticulous in enquiring into Quentillian's precise tastes as to milk and sugar.

As soon as he could, he made his farewell.

" I hope you'll come again, now you've found the way here," said Lucilla's aunt kindly.

Lucilla, as she had promised, went with him when he left " Balmoral."

They walked in silence for a little way and then Owen said pleadingly :

" You'll let me take you away from that, won't you, Lucilla ? It's an impossible life for you."

" Why do you confuse the issue like that ? It's just what I said before—you want to follow a generous impulse without counting the cost. My life has really nothing to do with the question."

He was frankly confounded.

" I thought it might be an argument in my favour," he said resentfully.

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"There's only one thing that could really count in that way—well, two things, to be accurate. Your need of me, Owen."

"It's quite real," he returned levelly. "I'm lonely, and yet the company of most of the people I know rather annoys me. And there's another thing. I'm frightened, very often. It's since the war, and—and you knew I'd been shell-shocked, as they call it? I've thought lately that if you were there—the reallest person I know—I shouldn't be frightened, at Stear. I'm giving you facts, Lucilla—not romance. We've both missed *that*."

"Val didn't stand to you for romance, did she?"

"No." Quentillian could think of nothing at all to add to his bald negative.

"Well, we've faced your risks," said Lucilla cheerfully. "What about mine?"

"The worst one is that you should find me an intolerable egotist," he said rather unsteadily.

"We can discount that."

She spoke curtly, and he made no rejoinder, uncertain of her meaning.

"What was the other argument that might count in my favour, Lucilla? One was my need of you. I think I've shown you that. But you said 'two things, to be accurate.' Tell me what the other one was."

"Is," she corrected, with a sound that was very nearly a laugh, and that caused him to look at her.

She faced his gaze with all her own steadiness, but for the first time he saw Lucilla's mild imperviousness, her implacable matter-of-factness, as a shield for something infinitely fragile and sensitive.

Her voice, always quiet, was quieter than ever when she spoke.

"It's fair to tell you, I think. I've loved you for a long time now. So you see my risks would be greater than yours, Owen. That's why I was afraid of impulse. But you see I've told you this—which was rather difficult to say—because it seems to me that our one chance lies in absolute honesty. We've faced the fact together that you're—just lonely, and that's why you want me—but—we've got to face the other fact too—both of us—I mean that, for me—you *do* stand for romance, Owen."

Her voice had not altered, but the effort with which she had spoken had brought tears, that Owen had never seen before, to Lucilla's eyes.

Nevertheless she smiled at him valiantly.

For the first time, perhaps, since his childhood, Quentillian found himself unable to analyse his feelings or to translate them into tersely sententious periods.

In the long silence that fell between them, there began a process by which he slowly reversed certain judgments, and eliminated certain axioms, which hitherto had stood to him for wisdom.

But it was with scarcely any knowledge of this that Owen Quentillian, reduced at last to making an appeal, asked Lucilla Mordard once more :

"Will you marry me? The risks are all yours—will you take them?"

With her most characteristic gesture, she bent her head in assent, neither impulsive nor emotional, but fully accepting responsibility, and said seriously and gently :

"Yes, Owen, I will."

THE END

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